

TOM JOHNSON

BY
ROBERT L. ROGERS

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TOM JOHNSON

BY
ROBERT L. ROGERS

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To m Johnson.

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TO MY FRIEND
HENRY M. ARMISTEAD,
OF THE LITTLE ROCK BAR,
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED.

TO THE PUBLIC.

TOM JOHNSON is the name of one of the characters of this story—not the only one, and to you, dear reader, he may not be the ideal one. Nevertheless, he is presented for your consideration.

There are both good and bad in this world, and Tom is one out of the common herd of bipeds that inhabit it.

When a man does right he does his duty; when he does wrong—do not always condemn him.

Tom Johnson comes to you with the characteristics and idiosyncrasies of humanity; and Katie Adams—well, but she is the woman in the case.

If Tom agrees with you, endorse him; if he differs from you—tolerate him. For which you will have the heartfelt thanks of

THE AUTHOR.

VAN BUREN, ARK., Oct. 25, 1902.

TOM JOHNSON.

CHAPTER I.

“No, Tom, you are wrong, there. As a general thing a man can do very well where he has been reared, and known from infancy, but there are a great many exceptions to this rule. When one settles down at home there are too many people that continue to 'look upon him as a boy, and will never consider him a man until he has passed the meridian of life.”

Thus spoke Ralph Sterling to his travelling companion.

The two young men were just returning from the University of Virginia, with their law diplomas in their pockets, and ever ready and eager to board the great ship that sails the sea of life.

There was a great contrast in these young

men; in their looks, size—yes, in their very nature—but they were fast friends. They had just graduated in the same class, and had been inseparable during their college life.

Thomas Johnson had, in answer to his friend's question, stated his intention of casting his lot at home—of locating in his native county-seat town in Arkansas, while Ralph was insisting on his going to Texas with him.

There was nothing more than mortal in these young men; nothing to attract the public attention; they possessed the average self-importance among young men of their age and station in life, although they were at the same time possessed of good, ordinary sense, and were hardly so egotistical as to presume that the revolving of the globe depended wholly upon how and when they should dictate that the axis should be oiled.

Tom Johnson was not what the young girl graduate would call an Apollo, nor yet a Romeo, but was simply an ordinary looking young man, and if he was in love with anything, it was the profession for which he had worked so hard to prepare himself. You would not have called

him awkward nor gawky, yet there lingered about him something that reminded you of the rural breeding that social intercourse with city-bred men and women seldom erases. Six feet tall and as straight as an arrow; hair that would have been called black by some and brown by others; blue eyes that looked sleepy or dreamy until their owner was aroused, and then they flashed as if they were directly connected with an electric current.

The father of young Johnson belonged to that class that had been well-to-do planters "before the war"—there being no such thing as a "well-to-do farmer," in the South in those days—and had owned in his time, a large well equipped farm or plantation, with plenty of negroes to cultivate it. The elder Johnson had cast his lot with his beloved Southland in that terrible struggle from 1861 to 1865, and when the end came, his negroes gone, his property destroyed and confiscated, devastation staring him in the face, he did not rise "Phoenix like," regain and rebuild his losses, but only survived a short time, passing away while the carpet-bag régime were in

power. Responding to the first call for Southern troops in 1861, he marched off at the head of a company, leaving Tom, an infant, in his mother's arms, and the mother living but a short time, left Tom to the tender mercies of an old "black mammy," who had cared for him with that kind, affectionate care, that have, or should have, immortalized them, and caused to be erected to their memory a monument, with a reverence to be handed down to generations. There is no haven of rest—no reward too good for the old "black mammy" of the South.

His father's death left Tom an orphan, and almost an outcast, at the age of ten. He was, figuratively speaking, "kicked out" for some time, making his own way, and, through his own efforts, had acquired a very good, common-school education. At twenty-one he found himself alone in the world without money or influence, but a very ardent ambition to make a lawyer. He had one friend—an old-time friend of his father, Judge Cype, who finally arranged for him to attend the great university, in the mother of states, by partially working his way

through, first in the capacity of janitor, then college librarian, and finally as private secretary to the president of the institution.

While at the university Tom had met Ralph Sterling, and the acquaintance had ripened with the years into a friendship as strong as that of David and Jonathan.

Ralph Sterling was the son of a rich banker and ranch owner, who lived in one of those grand old South Texas towns. Colonel Sterling, Ralph's father, had two sons. Ralph being the younger and the petted had been, as they say, "reared in the lap of luxury." He was a "dapper little fellow," almost feminine in his size and appearance, but he was every inch a man—a man as the word implies. With his dark, swarthy complexion and his keen, black eyes—as they gazed with a look of adoration into those of his friend's at his side, it was easy to discern that he worshipped Tom Johnson.

Ralph had proposed to Tom to go with him to some new Texas town and locate. He had plenty of money to set them up—start them with an office, library, etc., and Tom could repay his

part when the firm had made sufficient money to enable him to do so without hampering it.

The offer was indeed tempting to Tom, but he was proud, high-minded, and would have scorned any proposition that sounded as if there was a semblance of charity in it, and, while he had but few ties at home, it was his sole ambition to go back there and "make his mark," and show those that had scorned him what he could do—to humiliate the few proud relatives, of whom he had never asked a favor. This ambition he had nursed until it had ceased to be an ambition, but—revenge was the proper name now. He felt that he could accomplish this, and why not? He had friends there, was considered a bright young man, and old Judge Cype had often written while he was in college, telling him in very flattering terms what a bright future awaited him in his native town, if he would but come and settle down to hard work.

But Ralph pleaded; he painted bright and glowing pictures; he built air-castles of large proportion; he showed Tom what two bright young lawyers of their extraordinary ability

could do in one of the new and fast growing Western towns; he had them located in a small town that would soon become a metropolis, and the firm of Johnson & Sterling rich, with a lucrative law practice, and so popular that their friends were begging them to accept a seat on the supreme bench, or in the Senate of the United States, in a very, very short time, a few years at least.

Oh, what joy it is to shut one's eyes and gaze into the future; that is while the aerial architect of the mind constructs air-castles of such magnificent splendor. Your ambition drives the peg, and with a wide, reckless aim you go straight to it. You overcome every obstacle; you push them aside lightly and go on; you only see the bright beacon light of success, and grasp it eagerly—there is no ill-wind to whiff it out. While it may be far up the ladder of fame or success, yet you reach it; it is yours; you grasp it, hold it for a minute, cast it aside, and—go on dreaming. Perhaps on a different route, or perhaps you go back and start anew, and dream the same old dream over again. He who finds no

pleasure—no satisfaction in the future, can boast of but little in the past. But then——

When Tom and Ralph arrived at the place for them to take different routes for their respective homes, Ralph walked to the station window and purchased two tickets for Burnet, Texas.

CHAPTER II.

ONE of the most popular as well as prominent men in Burnet was Colonel James P. Sterling. He came to the Lone Star state when a mere boy, and had followed her leader, General Sam Houston, through the struggle for independence, and during the infancy of the then young republic had settled at Burnet, before there was a town by that name and had lived there since. He lived in a large house, built after the colonial style, in the outskirts of the town, with his elder son, John, when Ralph was absent. John was the cashier of the bank of which his father was president, and one of the principal owners. John did not look like his younger brother, nor was he, as to that. He was several years older than Ralph, and had been engaged in business since his boyhood. While yet under thirty, he looked much older, being small in stature, stoop-

shouldered and thin chested. He showed to be a man whose duties had kept him closely confined, and impressed you at once as a man whose mind was bent on the saving of the "mighty dollar."

Soon after the arrival of the young men in Burnet Ralph partially made known their plans to his father, who agreed with him in part, but was opposed to his going further West, assuring him that Burnet was a good enough place for him to locate for the purpose of practicing his profession.

The young men finally gave in, and a nice suit of rooms over the bank were selected for their office, and then they began the struggle—not altogether for bread, but for business, at least, and a "shingle" of bright gold letters was read by the public as it hung at the foot of the stairs:

JOHNSON & STERLING,

Attorneys-at-Law.

It was soon generally known that Ralph had come home, bringing with him a college chum

for a partner. Everybody liked Ralph, and prophesied success for him.

Their office had been opened but a few days when court convened, and the young lawyers made their first appearance at the bar. Judge Evans, who presided on the bench, was a personal friend of Colonel Sterling and was very fond of Ralph, hence he showed the young men every courtesy possible.

When court had been in session a few days, a case was called in which the defendant was to be tried for his life—on a charge of murder. He was without counsel or money, and Tom and Ralph were appointed to represent him. He was just a common tramp—the strongest testimony against him. They talked the case over with their first client, and as they were returning from the jail, Tom told Ralph that their client was an innocent man.

The evidence, if there was really any evidence against him, was purely circumstantial. A man had been found dead in the road—almost within the limits of the town, where he had been murdered no doubt for his money, and the tramp.

being found asleep near the place of the killing, was without further ceremony arrested charged with the murder—charged with the grave offense of taking a human life while attempting to rob him of his hard earned dollars. There had been some very strong talk of lynching—in fact, several demonstrations on the part of the people—and it was all that the sheriff and his able force of deputies could do to avert such action on the part of the people—not the mob. Tom and Ralph studied their case as best they could, and when it was called for trial, found them ready, strange as it may seem, to proceed—with a trial that would settle the fate of their client, and they, too, without testimony, but wholly relying upon the evidence of the prosecution.

The court room was crowded to its utmost capacity, as everybody had heard of the crime, and that the young lawyers were to defend the murderer (?). The older members of the bar came early, not that they were particularly interested in the case, that is, no particular phase of the case, not even the result of the trial—for the fate of the prisoner, whether he was hung or

aquitted, mattered little to them—but they came for the sole purpose of seeing and hearing the attorney for the state “devour” the youths who were to defend the prisoner at bar. Strange that there are some good lawyers, members of that noble and honorable profession, that will on occasions of this kind go to a court room for the sole purpose of being amused, have fun, at the expense, humiliation and degradation of a fellow-man, when a human life is at stake.

The evidence was all in, and after the instructions of the court, the prosecutor opened with a speech, “devouring,” as it were, the young lawyers, endeavoring to ridicule them out of court with bits of sarcasm and philippics thrust in advance, to “kind of bring them out.” He did not even confine himself to the record, knowing that he could “fudge” on the inexperienced and take positions that were unfair, not to say unscrupulous.

Ralph followed with a few rambling remarks, as well as the average beginner, but it was evidently very plain that he was no orator, and in fact would never become a very strong advocate

As Tom arose awkwardly to address the jury, every eye was on him. He looked not only embarrassed, but really pitiable, and at that moment there was a great deal more sympathy for him, in that court room than there was for the prisoner. He stammered, his throat was parched and his tongue refused to move at his will; he appeared as if he would be compelled to take his seat, but finally the embarrassment began to wear off, and his feverish brain began to act, and his tongue no longer stuck to the roof of his mouth. As he warmed up to his subject the eyes of the bench, bar and audience began to open. He was but a boy, but looked at times to be a man of mature years. At first he looked haggard and sorrowful, and then he brightened up, as the smile of confidence passed over his face. He was an orator, not poetical, but powerful, logical and convincing. Every utterance came from the heart, and the jury saw and believed—everything he said. Until this day they say that no man has ever made another such speech in the old Burnet court house. His

client was acquitted and the name of Tom Johnson became known in all parts of the country, and business began at once to come to the young firm.

CHAPTER III.

AMONG the leading and wealthy citizens of Burnet was the Hon. Louis Thomas. Mr. Thomas was a Federal soldier, and after the surrender located at Burnet, and had accumulated quite a fortune in the real estate and cattle business. After living a bachelor for some time he had married the widow of Major Adams, who died shortly after Mr. Thomas came to Burnet, leaving his wife and little daughter, Katie, the fortune he had amassed by hard work in the early Texas days.

Katie Adams had been reared by her mother, who had devoted every hour of her existence to her daughter's welfare, and the daughter, now eighteen, had just returned from one of the Eastern academies, where she had spent two years.

While she had been a spoiled child, yet she

was a sensible, well-bred, as well as a beautiful girl, and was not one of your vain, scornful creatures who think the only object in life is to flirt and wear pretty costumes. She was neither a blonde nor brunette, being of that medium that makes one think to tell the color of her hair, yet you see it in a hundred women every day.

Mr. Thomas and Colonel Sterling were great friends, and had been associated in business matters for many years, and—well, yes, it was generally understood by both families that John Sterling and Katie were to marry, some day.

Katie had returned home and the gossipers were all talking about her. Some said that the two years at school had brought wonderful changes, while others contended that she was the same beautiful, bewitching little “tom-boy” as of yore, when she could be seen dashing through the streets of Burnet on her mustang pony at a terrific rate of speed—a speed, in fact, forbidden by the “city dads,” and defined by the town ordinance as “fast riding,” if done by some farmer or cowboy.

But Katie Adams had a kind word for every-

one, no matter how poor or lowly. With wealth at her disposal she had been allowed to satisfy every childish whim, and yet the gossips said that she had no choice as to who should one day be her husband, but that she was brought up to understand that she was to marry John Sterling. Did she love him? Did she even like him—how can one tell? She had been away from home since she was fifteen, and it is safe to say that she had not seriously considered matrimony at that age.

But the gossips talked, nor was the gossiping less when the news came out that the Thomases would give a party in Katie's honor a few days after her return home.

We know but little about society, but perhaps this was her *début*, and as the society in small Texas towns was somewhat cosmopolitan, the "élite" were not all of the same calibre as New York's four hundred. The distinction in Burnet was only drawn between those of honest character, and those who did not possess that quality. The banker and the blacksmith, the lawyer and the drayman, all met on equality.

A wag once said, in speaking of West Texas society, that it was divided into three classes, to wit:

The first class were those who hired their washing done. The second class were those who did their own washing, and the third class were those who didn't have any washing done at all.

Be this as it may, everybody of respectability was invited to the Thomas mansion, and great preparations were being made for a nice time. Mr. Thomas had hands at work on his beautiful lawn and the trees prepared to be literally covered with transparent colors of Japanese lanterns.

* * * * *

Monday morning preceding the Wednesday night of Mr. Thomas' party, Tom reached his office very early. He was seated at his desk writing when Frank, the old darkey, came in to clean up.

"Good mawnin', Mr. Tom," said Frank. "You might yerly dis mawnin'. My! W'ite man, how you do study. Yes, suh, you de hawdest wukkin' man I ever see. Heah Jedge

Evans say las' Sadday dat you gwine t' make yo' mawk. Mr. Thomas say you don' go to chuch much, but des stay heah all day Sunday a-readin' an' a-wukkin'. He 'low dat wa'n't right; but Jedge Evans say dat he know men w'at go to chuch and pray wid er face er foot long on Sunday, and den on Monday mawnin' git up wid a scheme dey had hatched out on Sunday, fer to beat dar neighbo' in a hoss swap, he did. But, law, Mr. Tom, w'at a time dey gwine t' hab up to Mr. Thomas'. My wife dun been wukkin' up dar fer a week. Dey gwine t' be a monstus time, I tell you. Termor' is mah birthday, an' I tol' Sarah dis mawnin' I 'spec' you gwine give me er present; 'co'se I didn' know, an' she say, 'Frank, dat's a monstus fine man, Mr. Tom is,' 'deed she did, an'——"

"Here, Frank, is a dollar—your present," said Tom, "and now go over to the clerk's office and bring me some papers."

"Yes, suh, yes, suh, I will dat, boss. My, I'm gwine t' keep dis heah dollah long's I live in 'membrance o' you. Yes, suh——"

"Frank," said Tom, "to-morrow is your birthday—how old are you?"

"Law, boss, I gess I's 'bout sixty yeahs old. Yes suh."

"Are you just sixty?"

"'Deed, I don' know, boss, but I 'spec' I is."

"Then, Frank, how do you know it is your birthday?"

"'Cause, boss, Mr. Bennett say I was bawn on de fus' of July."

"But to-morrow is only the twenty-sixth of June."

"Is dat so? Well, well, dat am strange, sho', but den, well—boss, I mus' fetch dem papers. I'll be back in a jiffy," and with that the old negro darted out of the door.

Tom was leaning back in his chair, laughing at old Frank's plan to get a dollar, when Ralph walked in.

"Good morning, Tom," said Ralph, "you did not sleep in the office last night, did you? You are here so early in the morning and late at night that I hardly think you sleep at all.

"By the way, Tom, you have been here a year

now, and have kept yourself as secluded as a monk, aside from business. Why don't you go out some? Of course you will go to Thomas' Wednesday evening?"

"No, I think not," said Tom. "Some day I may be able to devote a portion of my time to pleasure and amusement, but now, to business—for a time, at least."

The reader must not for a moment think that Tom Johnson was different from other young men. He was sociable, loved the society of his fellow-man—of the ladies, too, perhaps—but he wanted to be independent. His life had been one of hardships, a struggle for bread, and his desire was to get a place in the world that would place him beyond want, where he could face the world as an independent man. Had he made any progress so far? Yea, beyond his most sanguine expectations.

Ralph pleaded and Tom yielded, and it was finally agreed that he would accompany Ralph to the party Wednesday night.

The people—the "élite" of Burnet—were on hand. Mr. Thomas, the host, and his amiable

wife were proud of the occasion. Mrs. Thomas proud of her daughter; and her husband—proud of the show he was making.

Tom, of course, was there. The young giant in the court room, in the forum, before juries, was now a bashful youth, when in company with ladies. The ablest opponents could not scare him in a trial, but a pair of female eyes could run him from the field.

The large folding doors between the dining-room and parlor were thrown aside, the floor waxed, the local string band was on hand, and the happy young couples, comprising the sons and daughters of merchants, bankers, ranchmen and mechanics, were dancing. Out in the lawn were croquet grounds, and tables of delicacies under the trees. Men in groups talked politics, religion, etc., and the women gossiped. And Tom was one of the subjects for the gossipers, for his recent victories had made him known.

As Katie was leaning on the arm of John Sterling out in the lawn in one of their promenades, they met Ralph, who inquired of them if they had seen Tom.

"You mean your partner, Mr. Johnson?" asked Katie. "No, and it was mean of you not to present him when you first came in. Now, Ralph, if you do not hunt him up at once you are in for a good scolding."

When Ralph had gone, she turned to John and asked:

"What about this Mr. Johnson? I hear his name everywhere. He is a newcomer here, and yet his friends and admirers are legion. People speak of him as if he were a young Demosthenes."

"Humph!" said John, "he is a bookworm; a fellow that is pretty smart, but thinks that he is a great deal smarter than he really is. I don't think much of him, but Ralph and father think him the greatest man in the state, to hear them talk. There is but little to say about him; he is as poor as Job's proverbial turkey, talks but little of himself, and, in my opinion, has a history that he would not care to have made public in Burnet."

Here John said too much. To raise a woman's curiosity, say something bad or mysterious about a man, and her interest begins. Sometimes they

begin to pity, and the old saw says that pity is akin to—a distant relative, at least, to—love.

Ralph soon found Tom, and ran upon John and Katie seated in the library, across the hall from the newly converted ballroom. Tom was presented, and a conversation began; the colloquy, however, would not be very interesting. At the start everybody did more talking than Tom, for, as Katie would ask questions, he would generally answer in monosyllables. John took good care not to leave, but Ralph was soon out, in the ballroom, or promenading the lawn with some local belle of the town.

Finally a young damsel of some thirty or more summers appeared at the door, and cried:

“Law, Mr. John, I’ve been looking for you everywhere—this is our waltz.”

And John, looking more displeased than otherwise, took her arm and left for the ballroom. After the departure of John and the village “Dulcinea” Katie began the conversation:

“Do you dance, Mr. Johnson?”

“No, I seldom do—that is, I believe—I never did.”

At this answer Katie broke into a hearty laugh.

"Pardon me, Mr. Johnson," she said, "but you talk so droll. Now, tell me," she continued, "how on earth do you pass the time away here? I am told that you seldom go anywhere. But I also hear you are a bookworm. Are you so fond of books that you can find more solace—enjoyment—with them than with social intercourse with your fellow-man?"

"No," laughed Tom, "that is untrue. I had almost as soon be called an idiot, Miss Adams, as a bookworm. A man who loves books, but who studies human nature with them, is no bookworm. I do not know that I have ever known a bookworm, but, as I understand the term, generally applied, it is one who has become a fiend to the habit of reading, and makes no application of his reading, but isolates himself from the society of his fellow-man to live, not with the authors, but to and with himself, and abuses the life God has given him in dreaming it away for self, instead of using his acquired knowledge in helping mankind. No man is a bookworm

that makes any application of what he reads—a bookworm is a literary miser.”

As Tom had only spoken “yes” and “no” heretofore, this burst of enthusiasm almost startled his companion, and she knew not what to say. When she told him that he had been called a bookworm his sleepy eyes seemed to sparkle with animation and he was aroused as if an insult had been thrust at him.

“But, of course,” she continued, “you have no time or taste for fiction, but confine yourself to your professional studies.”

“On the contrary,” said Tom, “I read fiction, and think it is as essential to the cultivation of one’s mind as the deepest logic and facts of the study of philosophy and history. I love novels, and read them, and, I will say, study some of them. Nor do I, strictly speaking, confine myself to what many are wont to call ‘old standards,’ either, but read what some are pleased to call the ‘modern yellow-backs,’ occasionally.”

“Of course good literature is often dry and not nearly so enticing as lighter, or, you might say, even trashy fiction,” she said. “But think of

the harm this modern romance does to the youth of the land."

"I do not think that there is really any danger of people with good sense being hurt by the reading of 'Mighty Dick, the Boy Giant Killer' literature, for sensible people will not read such stuff. The average modern novel is but a telescope with which to view human nature. Some magnify the vices, and some the virtues, and some with a side glance only show up the little idiosyncrasies of the characters, but nearly as frequently the authors."

"Yes, but the classics——"

"Ah, but everything with a little age to it is now a classic."

"Well, but," she continued, "the writers of fiction in the seventeenth and eighteenth century always blended interesting history with true romance."

"Well said, but did you not intend it vice versa? And more romance than history, too."

"Yes, but you cannot gainsay the result of such literature."

"True; I will admit that there are some peo-

ple of the present day that know more of history, gathered from the so-called historical novels, than they ever learned in school, to say nothing of its accuracy, but still it is, in my opinion, the lightest work of the author. His work is done in advance; his scenes are laid, and he has but to weave, as it were, the little thread of romance into the very warp of history already woven, and there you are. Perhaps he draws not nearly so much on his own imagination as Old Sleuth would in writing one of his half-dime detective pamphlets."

"I do not agree with you, Mr. Johnson. You know that Shakespeare sang history and romance——"

"Well, not quite. Shakespeare was a philosopher as well as a poet, and used his historical characters in name only, but painted them to suit himself."

"But are not Robin Hood and Ivanhoe historical characters?"

"Yes, indeed, but principally made so by novelists. Scott has immortalized Ivanhoe until it would be cruel now to find out that he was a

myth. George Washington and Paul Jones are historical characters, made so by historians handing down to posterity their deeds of valor; but the modern novelists never try to paint them without their efforts turn out to be caricatures, hence they generally let them remain as they find them in the primary history of the country."

"And then you call them plagiarists?"

"No, hardly so bad," said Tom, "but thought is frequently borrowed and no credit given."

"Well, if they have a tendency to elevate the morals and instruct the mind, it is not so bad, and, after all, we overlook many little things and excuse ourselves by saying, when we are reprimanded, that we only did it for pastime."

"Ah, but the sermonizing novelist. A novel with too much moral is a dangerous thing."

"Mr. Johnson, I hardly understand you. What say you of 'Ben Hur'?"

"Not so much as I would for 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' and yet more than I would for 'Quo Vadis.'"

"How you make the comparison of these books is what I cannot understand."

"I do not attempt to, but these are books of fiction with a moral, or, if I should refer to the latter, I should say—immoral."

"Oh, I don't know that you should call it that. It portrays the weakness of man, and they are as fickle as ever."

"In what sense do you use the word man, Miss Adams?"

"As the male member of mankind."

"Oh, I understand; but do you contend that the weaker sex are the only part of humanity that are improving on this line?"

"Of course, when you say weaker sex, you mean woman?"

"Yes."

"By way of digression, I will only admit woman to be weaker than man in but one respect—physically. No, not even mentally. Now," she said, with a pout, "I regret to be placed in an attitude where I must defend my own sex, especially from the standpoint of an egotist; but yes, woman has made progress in many ways where man has stood unmoved. Man, the biggest egotist on earth, lays down a code of morals.

not only for himself, but for woman as well. If the woman violates this code there is severe punishment in store for her—ostracism from all forms of society—while the morals prescribed for the man, by himself, are not only very lax, but there is no punishment whatever prescribed for their violation.”

“Then you blame man for prescribing this code?”

“No, not at all, but for violating what should be, and are, his own laws, and casting the burden on woman to uphold him in his own iniquity, and receive the punishment for his own crimes.”

“Miss Adams, you are daring.”

“Nay, only frank.”

“But how about woman? Is she the defender—ever—of her fallen sister?”

“No, of course not. She should never be the defender, but man will not allow her to be the rescuer.”

“Then you lay all the blame to man?”

“All. He builds the idol in public view, and with an iconoclastic club of his own design demolishes it in the dark,”

"I admit that we owe a great deal of the religious and moral sentiment we have to woman; to her we look for purity and chastity; from her we receive our best lessons, but man has responsibilities as well, and I think the true gentleman will pay the obligation he owes to society by demanding no more from woman than he demands of himself."

"Mr. Johnson, you are growing humorous. Do you mean that as a jest?"

"No."

"Then, if that were true, we would be in a pitiable condition, indeed, for, according to your definition, there are but very few true gentlemen in the world."

Tom looked horrified at this expression. He saw that this "chit" of a girl was leading him into deep water, but he had forgotten—in fact, he did not know the curriculum of the modern female academy, nor what he termed the up-to-date method of teaching—that a woman was now allowed to express a reasonable, sensible opinion without being called immodest.

The girl continued:

"Woman should not be judged alone by the

progress she makes in literature and art, for in that, even, she has had to battle for centuries with the stronger sex, who has always tried to retard any progress she might make."

"But woman's sphere——"

"What is it?" asked Katie.

Tom had no opportunity, had he been inclined, to answer this question, for just then some one came in, and the conversation drifted to local casualties.

Thus they talked on the topics of the town and the country until Tom's embarrassment had gone, and until so much of the evening had gone that the crowd had begun to disperse, and John and Ralph came in to bid the crowd good-bye. Tom arose to take his departure, extending his hand, giving the girl a hearty shake.

That night in his room Tom lay awake trying to look into the future; he would build a castle high up in the air, but a pretty face and two gray eyes would get in his way. He dozed off to sleep, and once his own voice awoke him calling the girl's-name that he had been with that evening.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW mornings after the party Mr. Thomas called at the office of Tom and Ralph to attend to some business matters. After he had attended to the matter, he began to chat politics. John Sterling had by this time come in. Mr. Thomas said that he thought the people of Texas should turn over a new leaf in political affairs; that, for instance, the then dominant political party, which was to meet in convention in Burnet in a few days to nominate a county ticket, should select good business men for the legislature. John agreed with him on everything he, Thomas, said.

"Mr. Thomas," he said, "you ought to go to the legislature from this county. Men who own the wealth of the country should help to make the laws of the country. You are interested

more in the legislation that will be passed at the coming session than any other fifty men in this county. I mean from a financial standpoint."

"Then he should not be a member of that body," said Tom.

"When a man has made a success of his own affairs, it shows his ability to manage the affairs of the public," said John. "What is the matter with government to-day? Its public men are only political financiers, and its greatest teachers of political economy live in mortgaged homes."

"True," Tom replied, "but I gather from the drift of your argument that each man wants to better the conditions that exist according to the necessity of the country, from his point of view, and that observation gathered from his own experience."

"Why, yes, to some extent," said John.

"While not admitting that all men, rich and poor, are so unselfish, yet granting that it is so, would it not be dangerous for men of wealth to control the law-making branch of the country?"

"Certainly not," said John. "Observation teaches them the country's need, and their business experience would enable them to place the government on a more safe, or solid, financial basis."

"Would that so-called financial basis be favorable to capital, or, what might be called, the laboring classes?"

"To both. The induction of capital into an undeveloped country is as much in the interest of one class as another."

"You are right," said Tom, "if that capital consists partly of the bone and sinew, that bring with them good society. Mr. Sterling, I would like to hear you name some needed legislation for our State that would be beneficial to all classes?"

"Well, I would favor the exemption for a period of twenty years of all manufacturing industries—especially those that would use our raw material, such as wool, cotton, etc."

"In this state we have some thirty or more unsettled counties, have we not?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then, why not exempt all farmers from taxa-

tion for that period, that will go there and settle?"

"Oh, that country is all right now. The cattle industry brings in a good revenue, and, besides, it is better suited for grazing than farming, anyway."

"But you believe in the old saying, 'The greatest good to the greatest number,' do you not?"

"Yes, certainly, but——"

At this juncture Mr. Thomas indicated that it was time they were going, and the conversation ended very abruptly, without either having the opportunity of defending his theory of political economy—the right that everybody has—to save the country.

It was very evident that Tom did not agree with John and Mr. Thomas.

After the departure of Mr. Thomas and John, Tom turned and asked Ralph:

"Mr. Thomas has considerable cattle interests, has he not, Ralph?"

"Why, he is one of the largest cattle raisers in the state," Ralph replied. "He has half a million dollars' worth of cattle now ranching in

the western part of the state, on the public school lands, and the last legislature came very near passing a bill opening the lands to settlers and making the cattle barons pay for their grazing. It is so monopolized now by the big ranchers that the little men have no chance. Father ranches in the west, but he owns his land, and besides he is not connected with any syndicate. The company that Mr. Thomas is connected with has nearly a million head of cattle."

"Oh, I see," said Tom.

Ralph was surprised later in the day to hear Tom humming a tune, and more so, when Tom began to question him about Katie Adams. He even went so far as to tell Ralph that she was a lovely girl—and a very sensible one, too. Ralph had never known him to manifest the least interest in any female on earth before.

"Yes," said Ralph, "I guess she will some day be my sister-in-law, for you have, no doubt, heard that she and John will probably marry."

Anyone looking in that direction could easily have seen the frown on Tom's face.

"Are they engaged?" Tom asked.

“No; not formally, and, practically—yes. That is, it has been an understanding between the families for some time that they would marry. It is the wish of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas. They all think a great deal of John, whom Mr. Thomas says is destined to become a great business man. You see, John had his portion of father’s estate set aside for him when he became of age, and has managed it well, being at this time worth considerable money for one of his years. He owns stock in several of Mr. Thomas’ enterprises, for, in his estimation, Thomas is the Napoleon of finance for this entire country.”

“Ralph, do they love each other—does she love him?”

Ralph laughed.

“Well, now, I can’t say just how far ‘gone’ they are, but from the indications, John, at least, has a pretty bad case—to use a Bowery expression. Then, of course, a quarter of a million dollars in ‘cold cash’ has some attraction for my brother John.”

“Ralph, do you think it right to marry for money?”

“Yes, if the union is agreeable, and the parties are suited.”

“Ah, you are right, Ralph—if the parties are suited. But are the parties ever suited if they do not love each other?”

“Tom, you put it too strong for me. I know nothing of your Romeo and Juliet affairs; but, practically speaking, I suppose they will love sufficiently. Anybody could love and admire Katie Adams. She is a pure, sweet, high-minded girl, and, to be frank with you, I am proud of her and John. John is ten years her senior, but that is no disparity in age, you know.”

They kept up this train of conversation for some time, and for some days.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after the party at the Thomases, Tom was returning from the post office, when he passed Katie Adams, who was seated in a buggy pulled by a vicious looking mustang pony.

Ralph also appeared on the scene about the same time, and a conversation began, the drift of which soon turned to driving. Finally, the girl invited Tom to get into the buggy, and she would drive him out over the country, give him some fresh air, and a view of the scenery. He at first demurred, but Ralph pushed him into the cart, telling him that the evening was nearly gone, and for him to go and get a fresh breath and enjoy a good ride.

Tom, as if in a trance, obeyed, hardly knowing what to do or what to say. The pony, with the bits between his teeth, darted around the

square at such a terrific rate that Tom, fearing that he would run away, grabbed the reins, when Katie, throwing her head back, gave a laugh that could be heard a block, and as she gave the pony another slap with the reins that started him over the old pebbled streets at a 2:30 gait, you could hear the loungers say: "Miss Katie will scare that young lawyer out of his wits before she returns."

Tom soon became accustomed to her reckless driving, and when they were out a short distance, the pony was allowed to slacken his speed to allow Katie an opportunity to describe the landscape. But it all looked alike to Tom. Everything looked bright. The face of the girl by his side was in everything he looked at; in the cabins on the road, in the tree tops, he could see the laughing face and big gray eyes of Katie Adams. They talked—not particularly of anything, but about everything. She told him that she was coming to hear him speak when court met again; that she had heard that he was quite an orator. Tom knew that this was not flattery, but it tired him to have it dinged into his ears

as if he was a prodigy, but not from her; oh, no, he could sit and listen to her talk always, and about anything. Her voice was music, and her laugh was rhyme to him.

"Mr. Johnson, I have heard a great deal of you, but not from you; you must tell me of yourself; of your people, and of your country. Everybody likes to talk of his country, you know. What state are you from, Mr. Johnson?"

"I was born and reared in Arkansas," said Tom.

Katie laughed—not a willful, insolent laugh, but her eyes were sparkling with mischief, and she showed that she could not help it.

"Why do you laugh at that?" said Tom, looking at her as if he were thunderstruck.

"Oh, pardon me, Mr. Johnson, but we Texas people have an idea of Arkansas—that is, some do—and it is an old saying for one to add, when stating that he is from Arkansas, 'now laugh.' But I did not wait, for I could not keep from thinking of that ridiculous saying when you told me where you were from. Of course, I know that there are not only plenty of good people in

your state, but that you will find as much culture and refinement there as you will in any part of our beautiful Southland."

Tom was puzzled. Sometimes she would look and act with all seriousness, and then she would go on like some giddy school girl talking to her chum.

"But I have but little to say of my home or my people," said Tom. "My mother died when I was an infant, and my father some ten years later. I remember my father, of course. My life has not been without hardships, and my path was not strewn with roses. While I am not ashamed of any part of my past, nor of my family, yet my former home has but few ties for me, and I have been sorely grieved on that account, for my life dream has been to succeed in my own country; among what friends I knew in my childhood days, where my father lived and died an honorable man. Home? Miss Adams, I do not know that I can give you the true definition; I do not know that I ever had a home, and yet, I revere the word, for the teachings of my father remain sacred in my breast, for I know that he

loved *his* home, where he merged into manhood, and wasted that same physical manhood, and the fortune he had been years accumulating, for a cause he believed to be right and just. It seems that I have a longing to go back and live where I was born—no particular spot, but to live there, somewhere in the country. No, I have no home; no spot of earth back there that I own; I never knew the tender words of a mother, and, I believe, that men and women reared without the care and influence of a mother are not what they should be. It seems that they are subject to melancholy and despondency, when they should be otherwise. In other words, they do not appear natural. Yes, I have something to live for; the same thing, in fact, that is the object of too many men and women of to-day, and that is *self*. Is that all—well, what else? I am no more egotistical than other men, and no more selfish, I hope, but my object and my sole ambition is to succeed in my profession; to make a name that I will not be ashamed of, and one that will not dishonor the father whose name I bear.”

Thus, like Othello, he had “told her the story

of his life," and whether she thought it strange or not, it was true.

Katie seemed changed. She did not appear to be so jovial as before.

"But," said Tom, "I believe that every man is destined to be the architect of his own future. He may be peculiarly suited for some occupation other than he chooses, yet I think it depends almost entirely upon his own efforts, hence, I have chosen a profession that I like, and will try to honor myself by honoring the calling."

"One thing, Mr. Johnson, that has caused me to view the profession of law with a lack of respect that is possibly due it, is the duplicity of the practitioner, and the want of proper regard for—I will say humanity, if not society."

"Miss Adams, I am not only surprised, but astonished at so astounding a remark—and coming from you. Proper regard for society! Why, our profession is the guardian of good government, and of society in all of its legitimate forms."

"Is it not considered legitimate, and strictly within your prescribed code of ethics, to take

any case that comes to you—provided the fee is satisfactory?”

“It is only the honorable lawyer’s duty to defend his clients’ constitutional rights, and though a guilty party was charged with a crime, or a debtor was sued, if they were his clients he should give them his best services.”

“Even if the accused was guilty, and the debtor owed the debt?”

“Why—certainly.”

“Then why prevent by law the sale of whisky, poisons, fire-arms, etc., by any person who desires to sell, for any cause, and without restriction?”

“Miss Adams, I do not understand you.”

“I mean, that according to your stock in trade, you can cause the law to be enforced or violated. Why deny this right to others?”

“No, you are—I beg your pardon—very unreasonable.”

“Then again, I cannot see how your profession can act as they do in the practice of the divorce law. With the most frivolous grounds for dissolution of the matrimonial bans they will bring

suits, thereby tearing asunder families, and making orphans."

"There again, I say you are wrong. I do not know how older men act in that matter, but I will never take a divorce case unless the cause is just—absolute abandonment, cruel mistreatment—or statutory grounds."

"What do you call statutory grounds, Mr. Johnson?"

"Ahem—infidelity."

"And do the lawyers profess to construe this law, and to enforce it with men the same as women?"

"Certainly."

"You are evidently new in your profession, Mr. Johnson."

"You are hard to understand, Miss Adams."

"And you, Mr. Johnson, are more unsophisticated than I thought you to be, if you believe the law to be enforced as you say it is."

"Miss Adams, I fear that you have a very poor opinion of your opposite sex."

"No, I treat them fair, but men are so incon-

sistent, and they seem to think women are simpletons."

"They certainly are not all as bad as you think."

"Well, I hope they are no worse."

"I fear that you are becoming a man hater, and are destined to be an old maid—you will never find your ideal in man."

"I pray no such calamity awaits me. I expect to take one out of the common herd some day, and——"

"Reform him?"

"Well, I do not care to assume any such unnecessary or hazardous undertaking, but when I do form that alliance—he will cease to be a wilful and wayward bachelor."

"Well, I hope you will make a lucky draw, for you know they say that marriage is a lottery, anyway."

"Well, I do not expect a paragon of virtue—I wouldn't have one. I want a man possessed of the high attributes of manhood, and do not think it will fall to my lot to get a saint."

Tom was stunned, and for some moments made no reply, and then the conversation changed to a subject that would afford more levity, and Tom soon became bold enough to laugh and talk freely. He became so bold that he intimated the supposed engagement of her and John Sterling, but she did not seem to understand him.

By the time they reached home the twilight was gone, and as Tom handed her out of the buggy, he very properly declined an invitation to go into the house, but bade her good evening, after thanking her for the ride.

Of course, John Sterling was a frequent visitor at the Thomases, and at church services he was generally seen with Katie.

Tom had called a few times, and was out riding with Katie on several occasions, and while he had never approached the subject to her, or any one else as to that, yet he knew that he loved her. Not that he simply admired her, but loved her, with that ardent passion that a strong man of his nature could love a woman. But when the thought of her being the promised bride of

John Sterling came up in his mind, a pang of jealousy took possession of him—a feeling that did not convince him that it was John that he loved—not even with a brotherly affection.

CHAPTER VI.

THE old town of Burnet was astir. It was a hot summer day, and great clouds of dust could be seen up the streets as the wagons, hacks and horses were coming from the country. The fence around the court house square was lined with hitched horses. Throngs of men were in the court house yard in clusters, on the street corners, in the hotels and saloons, talking politics, shaking hands, etc. Men with linen dusters and broad-rimmed hats—the gentlemen from Bitter Creek; the wool-hat and one “gallus” boys from the very forks of the creek, were there. Never was such interest manifested in the welfare of the families before as was elicited by the questions asked by the prospective candidates, of Tom, Dick and Harry. “How are the children? How is your neighbor, Bill Jones? You don’t say so! Well, well.”

It was the meeting of the Democratic county convention, held for the purpose of putting out a county ticket and to instruct delegates to the state convention. It was before the days of primary elections in that country, and the delegates, often candidates themselves, were generally sent to the convention uninstructed, and the man with the best "pull" with the leading and influential men generally got the office.

"The Burnet Bugle" had, in a leading editorial the week before, brought out the Hon. Louis Thomas for representative, urging the convention to nominate him for his keen business sagacity, his financial ability, and his great merits as a distinguished citizen.

Tom and Ralph were in their office looking down upon the mass of humanity gathered about the court house, watching the "buttonholing process," and commenting upon the frailties of mankind, when old Frank, who had been sent to the court house for something, came in.

"My, genl'men, but dar's a monstus crowd down dar," said Frank. "Is Mr. Thomas er can'date?"

"I don't know, Frank—why?" said Ralph.

"W'ile 'go I heahed 'im say might nice to a man, 'W'y, how'do, Mr. Jones; how's you gitten' 'long? An' how's yo' father?"

"'Ve'y well, thank you, sah,' says Mr. Jones, 'but mah father, he's dead, sah.'

"Den Mr. Thomas he say: 'You don't tell me; he was mah bes' frien'—how long he be'n dead, Mr. Jones?"

"'Sixteen yeahs, sah,' say Mr. Jones, and den I wen' 'long up to de cou't house, and w'en I come back Mr. Jones he pass by Mr. Thomas 'gin, an' Mr. Thomas, he dun furgit 'im, and say:

"'W'y, how'do, sah; I'm glad t' see you—how's yo' father?"

"'He's still dead,' say Mr. Jones, and den dey all laugh, an'——"

"Come on down to the court house, boys; the convention will meet in a few minutes."

The speaker was Colonel Sterling, and both Ralph and Tom put up their work and went with him.

Many eyes were on Tom as they walked across

the square, and one delegate, speaking purposely loud, nodded at Tom and said: "There goes good timber for the legislature, boys." But nothing was further from Tom's mind. He wanted to practice law, but had no desire to become a law-maker.

The convention was called to order and organized, the various committees appointed, and preparations were being made to begin the balloting for the candidates for the different offices.

One delegate offered a resolution instructing the representatives in congress a certain way on the financial question, and for the members of the state legislature to vote for the Hon. R. M. Milburn for United States Senator, his views on the financial question being in line with the resolution. Tom could easily discern the ear-marks of Mr. Thomas and John Sterling in the resolution.

Upon the adoption of the resolution several speeches were made pro and con. The delegate from Hayville favored it, and likewise the entire delegation from Salt Fork, etc., and so on.

Finally some one called on Tom Johnson.

"Let's hear from Johnson—Johnson, Johnson!" was the cry taken up over the house

Tom arose where he was seated in the rear of the house, but the crowd made him come up to the front and take the stand. He prefaced his remarks by saying that he did not come to take part in the deliberations of the convention; that he was a comparative stranger among them, and not a politician, but that as an American citizen he deemed the resolution iniquitous. He thought that it favored the corporations of the country, that it was bad to advocate such measures in a Democratic convention, and, he feared, would ultimately do much harm. He made a strong speech against this resolution—one that not only won, but caused him to be admired by almost the entire convention. A young stripling dared to oppose Mr. Thomas and John Sterling—he was independent. Several voices cried as he continued: "What's the matter with Tom Johnson for representative?" And the cry was taken up by the others. He tried to protest against his name being used, but to no avail, and his name, along with Mr. Thomas and others, was placed

in nomination, and he was selected by a large majority, and of course, the nomination was equivalent to an election.

Both Mr. Thomas and John Sterling showed that they were disappointed; in fact, they were almost enraged, and took but little care to hide their feelings.

Tom at first declared his intention not to accept the nomination, but his friends insisted, and he gave in to them. They crowded about him to shake his hand; to tell him that they needed such men in the legislature; men who knew their interests and were brave enough to maintain themselves, and fight for their rights. But Tom was not overly elated, as strange as it may seem, he wanted to practice law, and knew that to make a complete success he could not afford to get mixed up with politics. He felt that he was new in the country—having been in the state but a little more than a year; well—that he was almost a stranger to the people who had just honored him. Colonel Sterling and Ralph congratulated him, telling him that it was the very thing for a young

lawyer to go to the legislature one term, and then, of course, quit politics.

But politics is like intoxicants, when you first start to indulge the habit grows, and is soon deep rooted—it is almost as hard to quit as it is for a fiend to break away from his opium.

After the convention, as Tom was crossing the street, Katie in riding habit rode up to where he was. With a roguish look she exclaimed:

“You naughty fellow, you—I hear that you have defeated papa. How can I ever forgive you for such a crime?”

Tom began to tell her how it happened, when she broke in:

“Yes, I understand that it was a case of the office hunting the man, pure and simple; but that you were, however, like John Allen of Mississippi, around where the office could find you when it called.”

Tom, of course, did not understand her, but perhaps had he seen the mischievous twinkle in her eyes, he would have believed, at least, that her father's defeat would not cause her to become heartbroken.

Tom strode on up the street and met several friends (?) that insisted on him joining them in a few mint-juleps, which after a while—he did.

Ralph was surprised to find that evening at dark, his partner and friend still on the streets talking politics in a very excited manner. Ralph accompanied him to his room, where Tom retired without showing up at the boarding house to furnish food for gossips. “My God!” exclaimed Ralph, after leaving Tom, “it’s a crime—a heinous crime—to allow that man to take a drop of whisky.”

That night there were two men in close consultation in the cashier’s private room at the bank. They were avowed enemies of Tom Johnson, and, of course, their names were Louis Thomas and John Sterling.

CHAPTER VII.

"No, John, go right ahead and get everything fixed. Katie is a high-strung, strong-minded girl; even her mother cannot control her, so you had better go at once and arrange matters. You see, after you are engaged you can show her the absurdity of keeping company with Tom Johnson. Hang the fellow, but I believe that she likes him too well already, and we must do something to nip the matter in the bud, you know."

This was the character of advice that Mr. Thomas was giving John Sterling, relative to his courtship with Katie Adams.

They had both noticed Tom and Katie in their evening promenades and rides, and they also knew that Tom called on her occasionally, and as Tom had thwarted them in one of their schemes it began to dawn upon them that he

might become a formidable opponent in another. But neither of them knew of Tom's escapade with his political friends (?) on the day of the convention; in fact, no man in Burnet had ever seen Tom in a saloon, or known of him taking a drink of intoxicants, prior or subsequent to that time.

While Mr. Thomas and John Sterling were thus engaged in talking over their plans to keep Tom out of their way, Frank, the old darky, drove up in front of Tom and Ralph's office with a buggy for Tom, who by this time was downstairs, and, getting into the buggy, drove off—yes, to Thomas' residence.

He found Katie waiting for him, and the fleet-footed horses were soon out on the beautiful road running like a pike over the high, rolling prairie. In the extreme north it was nearly time for sleighing, but in this delightful climate it was pleasant weather.

They talked of the weather, because it was so easy to say: "What a nice day"—they talked of everything but the one subject that Tom wanted to talk about—one that he had made up his mind

to talk about on this very drive. He had known Katie Adams but a very short time, but he knew that he loved her, and had made up his mind to know his fate this very afternoon. He loved as only a man of his disposition could love a woman. He was poor and she was not, but he was not romantic enough to allow that to stand in his way; but, to do him justice, he never thought of her fortune; it was she whom he wanted. Tom felt that he was almost good enough for her, for it must be admitted that Tom was somewhat like the majority of mankind, and had a pretty good opinion of himself.

But to save his life he could not tell whether she cared for him or not. She seemed to enjoy his company; was always, or nearly always, cheerful and jovial when with him. He knew that it was generally understood that she was to marry John Sterling, but he did not believe that she loved him, and this was one reason that he made up his mind to push his suit.

They had started homeward and Tom had made no progress towards a proposition of marriage or an avowal of love. He could not, do

what he might, get the conversation to drift into the right channel; finally he made a desperate struggle and said:

"Miss Adams, I want to talk to you seriously, and want you to be serious while I talk."

To this she answered with a saucy laugh at his drollness, and asked him how she must act to be or appear serious.

"You are just like some giddy school girl," Tom replied, and in a manner that showed him to be somewhat irritated. He was quite uncere-
monious, to say the least, and his serious mood did but little to allay the levity of his companion. He might as well have said to her: "Be still, now, I want to make love to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Johnson; you are very complimentary, indeed, and I am lucky to have such a mature and austere gentleman for a chaperon. One who can instruct me in etiquette and make a great improvement on demeanor. I will endeavor to be more ladylike, notwithstanding the fact that I am neither a nun, nor have I been laboring under the impression that my uncheerful companion was a monk." Arching her brows

and assuming a dignified air she continued: "It is quite chilly, sir."

Indeed it was chilly for Tom. To use a pugilistic expression, he was knocked out in the first round. He looked puzzled, remained silent for some moments, and then said:

"Miss Katie—Miss Adams, I mean—you certainly misinterpret my meaning. I had no intention of wounding your feelings in the least, and I humbly beg your pardon."

"Granted, my lord," she said, with as much mischief as ever.

"Now, Miss Katie, do not consider me rude, but I want to ask you a question, and will do so without dodging it. Are you—that is—are you—you engaged to John Sterling?"

"No, sir!" she cried, and the shock was so sudden that Tom gave the horses, which had been leisurely walking, such a slap that they started into a brisk trot.

"Why do you ask that, Mr. Johnson?"

"Because it is public rumor that you are to marry soon."

"Then Dame Rumor, for once, is wrong. I will never marry John Sterling—never."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"Why?" asked the girl, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Because—you are ill-mated, and, pardon me, but I do not think you love him."

"No, I do not love him. I like him, and have known him since I was a child, but he is not my ideal for a husband."

"Miss Katie, I fear that your parents will be greatly disappointed if you refuse to marry him."

"Well, I do not know about that; I have never refused to marry him, for he has never asked me, to be his wife."

Tom began to look at the surroundings, and he saw that it was not only growing dark, but that they were nearing the Thomas residence in the outskirts of the town, and with what he thought to be renewed courage, said:

"I have been thinking a great deal lately——"

"No doubt," she said, "all professional men must necessarily do a great deal of thinking."

"I do not mean on that subject," said Tom.

"No? Then, pray, Mr. Johnson, what has been the subject of your thoughts?"

"You," he said.

"Me? Oh, I thank you for taking so much interest in my behalf, but I cannot understand——"

"Katie, what I mean is that I love you. Do you not know it? Can you not tell that I adore you—worship you?"

She cast down her eyes and was silent.

"Speak," he cried, "and tell me if you are angry with me."

"No, Tom, I am not angry—why should I be?"

"Could you care for me, then, you think?"

"Yes," she said, "I could, and I do. I love you."

Tom fairly jumped in his seat. He talked glibly for a few moments, for they were nearing the house, and he wanted her to say when they should be married, but she told him to wait, that she would think about it and tell him in the near future—that there was no necessity for being in a hurry.

Tom escorted her to the door of the house, and with an appointment to call later in the evening,

jumped into the buggy and drove off the happiest man in all Burnet.

* * * * *

Katie had dressed and made her appearance in the parlor a couple of hours after her drive, ostensibly to receive company. Going to the piano she picked up a piece of music, and no nightingale ever sang sweeter. Her voice had scarcely died away when a visitor was announced and ushered in. It was John Sterling.

Her disappointment could easily be detected by the faint blush that passed over her face. The greeting that John received was not overly-cordial and, in fact, he thought she was not as entertaining as usual.

John had been seated but a short time when Katie stepped to the door and gave some order to a servant, and added: "I will have company this evening; Mr. Johnson will be here." This was spoken in a low voice, but loud enough for John to hear, and to take the hint, as he thought. A dark frown shaded his countenance and he bit his lips as a pang of jealousy struck his breast when he heard the name of Johnson uttered by Katie

Adams. He knew that Tom would soon be there, and thought it best to have matters adjusted before he arrived.

"Katie," he said, "I want to talk to you this evening," and without waiting for her to answer, he continued: "I have been talking to your parents, and they think that you and I should settle down. You know that I have always loved you; since you were a little girl, in fact; and I have longed for the time to come when I could make you my wife. Of course, you would not want to marry one you did not love, nor one that did not love you. I flatter myself by saying that I am well able to take good care of you and make you happy. I know that you have considerable property, and you must have some one with business ability to look after it, and I am by no means a pauper."

"I am sorry, John, but I cannot marry you—I do not want to marry just now; that is, I do not love you well enough to become your wife."

"What!" He almost screamed. He had risen from his seat and was now standing, gripping the back of his chair as if to keep from falling.

"Have you considered this matter?" he asked, in a hoarse, but distinct voice.

"Yes, for a long time. I know that it has been the cherished wish of our families that we should one day be married, but I have made up my mind, and—for good."

John's face was almost black with rage, notwithstanding he tried very hard to conceal his anger—his almost uncontrollable temper.

"Has Johnson had anything to do with your making up your mind to not marry me?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she laughingly and saucily replied. "We are engaged to be married, ourselves, you know."

"What's that—you are engaged—who?"

"Why, sir, the Honorable Thomas B. Johnson, of the firm of Johnson & Sterling, and your humble servant." This reply she made with mock dignity, and, bowing very low, said: "Pray, be seated."

Hardly had they resumed their seats when Tom was announced.

If the reader expects a scene he will be dis-

appointed, for John Sterling soon found an opportunity to excuse himself, and retired. What he did and what he thought can only be conjectured, but it is hardly probable that his dreams were very pleasant that night, if they were mirrored from his thoughts of the evening.

Tom and Katie were too much encumbered with their own happiness to give thought to John, or any one else, and Tom had been in the parlor but a short time when he said:

"Katie, you have told no one of our engagement, have you?"

"Yes," she said, "I have told John."

A look of displeasure was noticed on Tom's face, as he continued:

"Do you not think that it would be a better plan to say nothing for a while, for, of course, your parents will object to our marriage?"

"Yes, Tom, I had to tell John. He asked me to marry him, and when I declined his offer, he accused you of being the cause, and then—I told him. I believe that my mother will be willing for me to marry the man I love, when she knows all."

"I hope so, dear ; but if she should refuse?"

"Tom, I love my mother, and want to be obedient, but there is a time when—well, Tom, I will forsake all for you, if you will but let me.

"Tom, have you another sweetheart—have you a picture of any other girl? If you have you must send it to her at once—no, destroy it. Remember that you are mine, now, mine ! You must not give me cause to be jealous, Tom. I must and will have all your love or none ; I am no plaything——"

Tom, in a fit of laughter, replied :

"Why, my stars ! You little goose ; what put such ideas into your head? You are my first and only sweetheart, dear."

"Oh, Tom, I don't know what is wrong with me, but I fear that something will come between us. Let nothing come to separate us—let us have no secrets ; let us confide in each other. Tell me," she said, after a pause, "all your love scrapes ; I will forgive you for the past, but your future is mine. I am a part of your life henceforth. No, tell me nothing. I could scratch her eyes out—I will ! Is she a blonde? Yes, I know she is ; one

of those flaxen-haired, doll-faced girls that silly men go crazy and rave over——”

“Say,” broke in Tom, “what are you raving about? There is no girl—I swear it——”

“Will you? Oh, Tom, don’t deceive me, for——”

“Oh, pshaw, little girl.” And the rascal mustered up courage and took her in his arms, and actually kissed her.

Well, it would not be fair to further pry in on their tete-a-tete, and we will draw the curtain and leave them for the present enjoying the happiness of the bright sunshine, that is often followed by a storm.

CHAPTER VIII.

As the time drew near for Tom's departure for the Capitol, where he was to assume the duties as representative for Burnet county, it began to dawn upon his firm that he would be greatly missed, and that Ralph needed, or would need, some assistance during Tom's absence from the office. They therefore decided to obtain the services of a stenographer. They wrote a leading attorney in Austin to look out and send them a good stenographer, and in a few days received a telegram stating that one would arrive on the next train.

To their utter astonishment—for they were looking for a young man—a young lady came to the office with a letter from Judge English highly recommending Miss Ella Arnold, not only as a competent stenographer, but a lady as well.

It was not long before Katie called on Miss Arnold at her boarding place, for she had obtained board at one of the best families in Burnet, and found her to be a good, sweet girl, as she afterwards said, and a warm friendship at once sprung up between them. Katie Adams did not think that she was condescending by visiting this girl, and by having her call on her, for she was too sensible for that, and was endeavoring to lighten her burdens and make her stay in Burnet pleasant, for she had to earn her living by hard work—honest and legitimate toil.

Miss Arnold's first impression of Katie Adams was that she was a splendid girl, but awfully daring in some of her opinions. Of course, as Miss Arnold was in the employ of Johnson & Sterling, that firm came in for a part of the conversation, and Miss Arnold thought that in Katie Adams' opinion, the firm consisted wholly of Mr. Thomas B. Johnson, and that the future success of the state depended upon the Honorable Thomas B. Johnson, and that while this country of ours could have in the past boasted of some great men, they had, at the present counting, been

thinned down to one man, to wit: Tom Johnson.

Miss Arnold soon became familiar with the work of the office, and when Tom left for Austin, a few weeks after her arrival in Burnet, she had virtually become a fixture in the firm.

The legislature had been in session for some time before anything of unusual importance took place. Tom took hold like an old timer, so to speak, and soon convinced his colleagues that he was no mediocre.

Shortly after the convening of the general assembly Katie Adams and her mother accompanied Mr. Thomas to Austin, where, it was said, he went to lobby for the corporations that he represented.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Thomas objected to Katie's choice of Tom, but she proved to be, in that light, a very stubborn girl, and demonstrated that she had a will of her own. She and Tom were naturally thrown together a great deal while in the capital city.

Mr. Thomas and John Sterling had been instrumental in circulating all kinds of reports about Tom, endeavoring to break the engage-

ment, but to no avail, for it seemed that Katie was easily convinced that the reports were untrue, and they were happy in each other's love.

During the session of the legislature a bill was introduced authorizing the state to lease certain school lands to cattle-men at one cent per acre annually, but no lease to let for less than ten thousand acres, and for a term of not less than ten years.

The bill was referred to a committee of which Tom was a member, but before it could be acted on by the committee Mr. Thomas sent out cards for a reception at his hotel in the city, but which was in reality intended as a banquet for the supporters of this, his pet measure, and, of course, Tom was invited and attended.

The banquet was "for men only." While the wine was red some one proposed a toast to the new bill, and as Mr. Thomas was the manager of the whole affair, and having introduced Tom as his "home representative," it was taken for granted that he, Tom, was a strong advocate of the measure, hence, he was called upon to respond to the toast.

Finally he arose and said: "Gentlemen, had I known the object of this meeting I probably would not have been here. I have read this bill with a great deal of interest. It was drawn by the hand of a genius and emanated from the minds of men who know their business, as well as their interests. (Cheers.) It will promote the cattle industry and knock the 'grangers' sky-high. If it, or some measure like it, does not become a law a few short years will see a little farm house on every section of land in the great Pan Handle of the Lone Star State, now the 'Ranchmen's Paradise'—and then woe be unto the cattle magnates. (Hear, hear!) Man cannot serve two masters—no straddling this question—we must show our hands and fight straight from the shoulder, hence, I am in favor of the bill—(Good, good!) being killed outright. (Great consternation.) So, gentlemen, in your scheme to rob the school fund, the school children of this country, retard legitimate immigration, in order to put money in the pockets of the men already grown rich through corrupt legislation—you may have acted wisely in some respects, but in one, at least,

you have not. So, gentlemen, I will retire—you have invited the wrong man to meet with you.”

No bomb-shell ever raised a larger commotion in a soldier's camp than did this statement of Tom Johnson at the Thomas banquet. What does he mean? was asked by every one, but Mr. Thomas could not reply; he seemed to be dazed.

Every means known to schemers and lobbyists was brought to bear on Tom to get his vote and influence for this measure, but to no avail, and when the bill came up for final action, Tom not only voted “no,” but spoke against it, and of course was instrumental in causing its defeat. He advocated the changing of the title of the bill to read: “A Bill for an Act to be Entitled an Act, to Authorize Cattle Corporations to Steal Ten Million Dollars from the People, and to Bar from the State Honest Immigration.”

If Mr. Thomas had disliked his representative before, he hated him now, and he then formed a resolution to be revenged. His pet scheme gone and defeated by this young “stripling” who had been in his way ever since his arrival in Burnet.

The legislature was about to adjourn, and

Tom would return home—back to Burnet. The people there all knew of Tom and Katie's courtship, and many claimed not to be at all surprised. But it was a bitter disappointment to at least one person. Colonel Sterling was a grand old man, was greatly admired by Tom, but his whole heart was set upon John marrying the girl that he had selected for him when she was a little tot, hence, he, of course, was grieved, and we might say that the warm friendship he had had for Tom was beginning to wane—he could not help it.

Ralph had almost worshipped Tom, and while he and Tom had talked but little of the latter's engagement to Katie, he could not but think hard of his bosom friend, whose actions he began to look upon as almost a crime. He was hurt, yet he loved his old college chum and partner.

CHAPTER IX.

“’Tis human to err.” This world is full to overflowing of humanity—erring humanity.

During the session of the legislature Tom had conducted himself in a most exemplary manner. His environments were such that he had no excuse for not doing right. The atmosphere that he lived in was pure—with the aid, encouragement and advice of the woman he loved. But Tom was only human, and had one of humanity’s weaknesses, if not curses.

Some days after the adjournment of the house, he had business in the city of Austin before the Supreme Court. He was chief counsel in some very important litigation, and in an oral argument before that august body he acquitted himself so well, that he was the recipient of all kinds of compliments from the members of the

bar. Tom was not easily flattered, but finally he was fully convinced that few, if any, other men in the country could have done as well as he did. They talked of him and his speech on the streets, in the offices, the hotel lobbies and finally, yes, in the barrooms of the town.

Tom, knowing his weakness, repeatedly refused to join his friends to tip glasses, but—finally he fell.

He was of that temperament that the first drink was the fatal one. Within twenty-four hours the very men that were patting him on the back and praising him for being the greatest man in the state for his age, were now disgusted with him, and shunning him.

What a pity some men are so constituted.

“Oh, God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should, with joy, pleasure, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts.”

Tom Johnson forgot himself, forgot his manhood, forgot his business—he was not Tom Johnson.

The day came for him to return home and

he failed to appear. Another, and yet another day, and not knowing what kept him Ralph wired to ask the cause of his delay, and his answer was from the landlord of Tom's hotel telling him to come to Austin at once.

Imagine Ralph's horror to find his friend in a beastly state of intoxication; blear-eyed, mind and body wrecked, honor gone—fallen in three days from almost the very pinnacle of fame—of honor, to say the least—to the very lowest depths of degradation.

Reader, do you condemn him, and call him a brute? Do you censure him as one guilty of an unpardonable crime, for taking this step? This fall, caused by one drink of the destroyer of man! God made Tom Johnson, and vested him with his disposition, his good and his bad qualities. Did you ever know a Tom Johnson? No? And yet the world is full of them.

Did you ever know a young man to rise step by step, by his own efforts, until he had attained honor—a standing among his fellow-men that the brightest and ablest could boast of—and in a short time acquire the drink habit, and within a

month gain the reputation of a drunken sot, while it took years and years to gain what he had lost within that month?

Did you never suffer the remorseful pangs of debauchery? REMORSE! No language can describe that word.

One false step throws away a decade of toil and study. One glass—the first one—of that vile stuff that takes men's souls, makes demons of gentlemen, can and has caused more unhappiness in men's lives than all of the other vices on earth, that is if you call it a vice with all men, and not a disease with some.

Did you never know a poor, unfortunate, honorable man, to pray a hundred prayers in quick succession, asking the Great God to send a stroke of paralysis to deaden his arm and hand if he ever attempted to take another drink, and—within a few hours afterwards be out of his place of business, away from home and loved ones, beastly drunk, surrounded by associates that were as far beneath him as the criminal thug is the Christian gentleman? Ralph remained with Tom a day or two, and leaving him in

the care of physicians returned home, thinking that the affair would be kept to some extent, a secret, but alas!

Mr. Thomas had been in Austin, and had of course heard the story in details, and after magnifying the said details (the true facts were bad enough) prepared to have them dished out to the gossipers of Burnet.

The morning after Ralph's return Miss Arnold asked:

"Mr. Sterling, when do you look for Mr. Johnson home?"

"Why,—er—in a few days, I suppose, Miss Ella. Why do you ask?"

"Well," she replied, "to be frank, Miss Katie has made several inquiries, and I fear she is greatly worried. She thinks that he has had some misfortune."

"He has, indeed," said Ralph.

"And she has not been informed?"

"Why, yes—that is no—I mean, Miss Ella, that Tom will be home in a short time. Nothing serious, I assure you; only a matter of business that he must attend to, you know, that will keep

him several days yet. I wish, Miss Ella, that if you feel inclined you would take a walk over to Mr. Thomas' and tell Katie that Tom has been detained longer than he expected and will not be back for a week yet."

Miss Arnold laughed at the blunder Ralph was making in getting up an excuse for Tom, but Ralph continued:

"And you might say that he asked to be remembered—yes, that is if you care to go."

"Certainly," said Miss Arnold, "for I know that she is very anxious to hear from him. Why, the poor girl is nearly distracted. Ahem, Mr. Sterling, I hope you will not consider me presumptuous, but—of course you have heard of the slanderous remarks going about here relative to Mr. Johnson? I am sure that is what is worrying Miss Katie."

"Slanderous remarks—why, what do you mean, Miss Ella?"

"They are circulating the report," she replied, "that Mr. Johnson is, and has been drunk for several days, and that he has lost, or made way

with considerable moneys belonging to clients of the firm, that he had in his possession."

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Ralph.

"Oh, I am so glad it is untrue."

"That is, I mean, he has not lost any money, and none of the firm's clients will lose anything by it—will lose anything. Miss Ella, let the matter drop. I beg your pardon, but I do think that the people here are very eager to gossip."

"Then, I presume part of the report to be true?"

"True—why, what do you mean, Miss Ella?"

"I mean, Mr. Sterling, that if you will tell me, I should like to know the whole truth. If I am to face that girl with a falsehood, I want to know it. Of course, you do not expect—do not want me to tell her the truth."

"Miss Ella, I don't know what to say!"

"That will do, Mr. Sterling. I know more than I want to now," and she returned to her desk in the next room.

Colonel Sterling came into the office in a few moments, and seemed to be greatly agitated.

"Ralph," he said, "what about these reports on Tom Johnson? I have heard some fearful things, and if they are untrue they should be strenuously denied, for it will damage your firm, and your name. And if true—well, son, you cannot afford to have your name connected with him. I understand, sir, that he has used funds belonging to clients of the firm. What will you, or what can you do, Ralph?"

"Father, Tom Johnson is an honorable, upright man—that is all I can say. Now, please do not press me, for I am not just now prepared to explain; but that I repeat that he is an honest man, and has not wrongfully used any money belonging to others."

"I hope you are correct, sir, for I have always entertained the greatest respect for the young man, and on your account, I hope there is no foundation for the accusation, but I——"

"That is all right, father, we will talk about the matter later on. I want to assure you that all will be right within a few days."

"I sincerely hope so, my son," said the old

gentleman, as he left the office seemingly much disturbed.

Almost immediately after Tom's return from Austin he called on Katie. His head bowed with shame, remorse gnawing at his heart, he met her. He at once made a complete confession to her—telling her all—at the same time saying to her that if she desired he would release her from her promise to be his wife, for he felt that he was unworthy of a good woman's love.

"No, Tom, that is what you need. Not that I am a good woman, but my life is yours, and to you I expect to devote it. I am so sorry for you, and my constant prayer is that you will never forget your manhood again. I do not censure you, but pity you, and may my God so guide me that you will never have cause to err from any act or thought of mine."

He did not reply. He only held out his hands, and she came to him, laying her head upon his shoulder, and, well—no curtain lecture ever did do as much good as the soothing words from the woman man loves.

CHAPTER X.

BURNET county was at this time—before the advent of the barbed wire fence—generally speaking, a stock country. Large portions of the county being sparsely settled. Only the valleys of the larger streams, such as the South and North Gabriels, and Oatmeal creeks, beautiful streams, and the Colorado river, were settled by farmers. A great portion of the county consisted of high, rolling prairies, but nearer the river were large chains of mountains. The old Spanish land grants are still in evidence in Texas, and in this part of the state at that time many of the old leagues were still intact.

Between the two Gabriels, on a beautiful divide several leagues of land had been bought by men, not all Northern men, but some of them born and reared in the Lone Star State, and stocked with sheep. This raised a great howl

among the so-called cattle-men, who expected, as they had been doing, to run their cattle on free range. In fact it precipitated a war, so to speak; and as the cattle-men were in the majority, were in the saddle, as it were, having with them the officials of the county and the backing of the financial men of the country, it looked for a while as if the sheep men would be wiped from the face of the earth. After trying to buy their lands and failing, they then began to try to oust by violence, and it was nothing unusual for a poor shepherd who had not a dollar's interest in his flock, to be called from his tent at night, whipped and ordered to leave the country, the brush fence that penned the sheep burned up, the sheep scattered, and the ranch property injured in every conceivable form.

Many of the good citizens were doing what they could to avert the spilling of blood as well as the destruction of property. The county attorney, an honest, courageous fellow, was doing what he could to bring the criminal parties to justice, but all his efforts were futile.

Finally, two of the leading sheep men, Bud

Aker and Adolph Mickel, having defended their homes and property with shot guns and Winchester's until they were compelled to bring their families to town for protection, called on the firm of Johnson & Sterling.

Judge Lucas, the most prominent and one of the ablest lawyers in that section, being the former counsel of the cattle-men had refused to have anything to do with the matter.

While Aker and Mickel were both brave men, yet the stories they told of their treatment were horrible. The hirelings of the men who owned the cattle had committed depredations that belonged to the age of barbarism, and the proof, at first seemingly meagre, could easily be procured, were it not for the fact that many of the witnesses were afraid to testify, knowing the influence that was against them, as well as the character of men with whom they had to deal. And strange to say that men among the very best citizens took sides with the cattle-men. Up to within a few years ago there were good people in Texas who thought it impossible for any man to ever go to heaven that owned a sheep.

Tom and Ralph were retained by Aker and Mickel to look after these matters, and assist in the prosecution of the parties, charged with arson, etc., and when district court met, Tom had, he being the trial member of the firm, gotten together the testimony, and with the assistance (?) of the district attorney, who turned the case wholly over to Tom, succeeded in sending several parties to the penitentiary.

In this move Tom created new enemies for himself, for the whole blame was laid to him, as Ralph did not take a prominent part in the trials. Tom had now, not only Mr. Thomas and John Sterling planning to ruin his happiness, but a set of men that would stop at nothing, possibly planning to take his life.

He was the recipient of many anonymous letters, notifying him to leave the country within a given number of days, but to all of this he paid but little attention—in fact, said nothing about it. But you cannot keep these things in the dark in a little town like Burnet, and it leaked out that his life had been threatened, greatly alarming his friends. Of course Katie Adams

was very much disturbed about the matter, and cautioned him, as did Ralph.

Old Frank, who not only worked around the office for Tom and Ralph, but was a kind of a "general roustabout" for the town, came to Tom one day, and told him that he overheard some men—cowboys—talking in Galloway's saloon, and from what he gathered in the conversation, they had planned to take Tom from his room the next night and horse-whip him.

To this Tom only laughed but old Frank looked serious and said:

"Mr. Tom, you don' know dem men. I'm gwine tell you, suh, dey's scoundrels, an' mean 'nough t' do anything, suh. I know, 'cause you see I was all mixed up wid de kuklux an' de paterollers, yes, suh, 'deed I was. Ef dey does come 'round," he continued, "you jes' le'm me know in time, an' I'll give de fus' man w'at teches you de full extents ob ol' Lucy."

"Who is old Lucy, Frank?" Tom laughingly asked.

"Ol' Lucy? Dat's mah ol' muskit, suh, an' dey

ain't no gatlum gun can run 'long side 'er, suh, nuther."

Tom tried to dispel any fear on Frank's part, assuring him that he could take care of himself, but that in the event of trouble he would be glad to have him and "Lucy" present. The darky left seemingly much disturbed, or as he would put it, "mighty pestered."

Tom roomed in the upper part or story of a building on the public square, and after he had retired to his room the next night after he had had the conversation with Frank, he heard a knock, and upon opening the door, confronted the old darky.

"Well, Frank, what is it?"

"Mr. Tom," he said, "I hope you'll 'scuse me, suh, but I dun come t' ax you if you'd lef me stay wid you to-night?"

"Frank, I thank you for the interest you are taking in my behalf, but I must ask that you return home, and at once, and don't let me hear any more of this foolishness. Why, I am no 'booby,' to be afraid of a dirty pack of cowards."

"I know dat, suh, but you don' know dem men,

an' I do. Mr. Tom, dey gwine t' hu't you sho', ef you don' look out."

"Frank, I tell you to go now, or I will lose my patience and say something that I will regret. Go home, and I will be able to take care of myself."

"All right, Mr. Tom, but you mus' keep yo' eye op'n." And Frank reluctantly went downstairs.

Tom went back and soon retired for the night, and something like an hour later old Frank crept back up the stairway. Tom was the only occupant of the building at night. A dim light was burning in the hallway that passed his room, but just at the head of the stairs was a little alcove, and being rather dark here, Frank secreted himself, and sat down on a cracker-box, with "Ol' Lucy" across his lap.

Everything was quiet on the streets. There was probably not another house in the town open, unless it was the saloons beyond the square—or beyond the court house from where Tom roomed; the town marshal had long since retired, and with the exception of an occasional

howl of some cur dog, the town of Burnet was as quiet as a cemetery.

Frank did not have long to wait before he heard murmurings on the side-walk below, and directly two men came quietly up the stairway. They could not see Frank, but they were both within plain view of him, being in the main hall, which was lighted to some extent. They both wore masks, and each had a pistol in his scabbard. When they got fully in the hall, and before reaching Tom's door, a deep, African voice said:

"'Scuse me, gen'men, but hol' up, an' don' you tech dem guns, 'cause Ol' Lucy's loaded jes' 'bout fo' foot up de ba'l wid slugs an' tenpenny nails. an' she's pow'ful loose in de triggah—dun cocked, an' ef mah fingah was jes' happ'n t' tech de ding thing, dey'd be a ratterment heah, sho'."

"Who are you?" roared one of the men, stepping back as if to draw his gun.

"Nu'mine 'bout dat gun, boss. Jes' tech dis triggah, you know—mah fingahs are gittin' pow'ful shaky, too. De ques'shun am, gen'men, who is you? I'se putty well known 'bout heah, an' I

ain't— Don' do dat, boss, 'cause I gwine lose cumtrol dis heah thing torectly. Ol' Lucy get pow'ful stubbo'n sometimes, an' ef she do haf t' go off dey'll be jes' boodles ob ha'r an' blood t' spa'h 'roun' heah. You see dey's a private con-flab gwine on in dis heah house, an' de folks, dey don' want t' be pestered, so I suspec' you bettel face 'bout an' git down dem steps. Yes, suh, pow'ful easy on triggah—woa-a-p, boss, mah finge's jes' eachin' t' tech it!"

Just as the men started downstairs, cowed, being thwarted in their attempted villainy by the old darky, Tom came to the door, hearing voices outside, to see what caused the disturbance. He came out in time to see the men, and see Frank march them down to the street, but by the time he, Tom, could get down, the cowards, joined by several others, had mounted their horses and were riding away in a gallop, hardly reaching the edge of the town before they set up a few Comanche yells, and fired some twenty or more shots from their pistols, just to show the citizens of Burnet how bad they were.

Tom did not chastise Frank for returning and

standing guard over him, but thanked the old fellow for his actions from the bottom of his heart, for after Frank had gone he wondered after all what he would have done had he been alone, for he then realized that he had been unarmed—for that matter, Tom had never carried nor owned a pistol.

It is a matter of fact that the midnight visit of these ruffians was the talk of the town, and old Frank was the latest hero.

Katie sent for Tom and had him tell her the whole affair. She swore dire vengeance against the whole gang of cut-throats, herself. Oh, she could just claw their eyes out!

Tom's many friends came to him and offered assistance to bring to justice these fellows, but Tom told them to let them go, that he would be on the lookout henceforth, and he flattered himself that he was a match for them.

CHAPTER XI.

CONSIDERABLE excitement prevailed in Burnet over the attempt of the ruffians to do Tom bodily harm. He had won the enmity of these men because he dared to do what was right, and had some of the officials of the county done as much there would certainly not have been as much trouble.

Men continued to come to Tom, offering to do what they could to ferret out the affair, and punish the men who were trying to take his life, but he insisted on doing nothing for a while, at least.

The people of Burnet were by this time nearly all on his side, and were highly incensed at his treatment.

It soon came to his ears that Mr. Thomas was in league with these men, and, in fact, incited them to attack him, believing that he could be

scared out of the country. Thomas wanted to get rid of Tom at nearly any cost, but was hardly cold-blooded enough to take life, or cause it to be done, and certainly was not brave enough to do it himself.

Tom was, of course, horrified when he heard that Mr. Thomas was implicated in the affair to get him out of the country, and went to work to convince himself of the truth or falsity of the charge, and was soon in possession of facts that convinced him that it was true.

After he had the absolute proof of Thomas' complicity, he accosted him one day and confronted him with the charge. Thomas tried to, and did, feebly deny it at first, until Tom convinced him that he knew all. Tom told Mr. Thomas that he knew he was a dirty coward; and that he did not have the manhood to come up and fight a man to his face, but was so low-lived that he was compelled to hire a pack of scoundrels to do his dastardly work, and that now he knew his game, and would watch him as a dirty sneak deserved to be watched.

To be sure Thomas did not resent this thrust

—cowards seldom do resent anything of this kind.

While Tom said nothing of his discovery to anyone except Ralph, it became known—at least it was soon town rumor—that Mr. Thomas was in some way mixed up in the affair, and while many at first were loath to believe that he would do anything so low and mean, yet many suspicious glances were cast at him as people would pass him on the streets, and inwardly they would condemn him, but, then—money covers a multitude of sins, you know, and Mr. Thomas was soon *Mr. Thomas* again, the wealthy man of Burnet.

Tom wrote Katie a note in a few days asking her to meet him at a mutual friend's. There he told her the news, and of course explaining to her the impossibility of ever entering the portals of the Thomas' residence again. It was decided by these young people that they would be married at once, and it was so agreed upon by them, the date being fixed for a few weeks later, Tom promising to go through the formality of asking the consent of Mrs. Thomas.

On the Sunday night after his meeting with Katie, while Tom was returning from church, he was fired on from ambush, the attempted assassin secreting himself in an alley. Two shots were fired, but as if by an act of Providence neither shot took effect, the villain being either too frightened to take steady aim, or too cowardly to get close enough to hit his mark.

This certainly wrought the people up to a high pitch. A citizen had been assaulted on the Sabbath night, almost within the very shadow of the church steeple, and within a few blocks of the court house—that temple of justice erected and maintained by a civilized, law-abiding, God-fearing people.

This was the topic of the day for a while, and, no doubt, being influenced by Mr. Thomas, Colonel and John Sterling, the latter being instigated instead of influenced, came to Ralph and asked him to prevail on Tom leaving the town. This Ralph promptly refused to do. While he honestly believed that his friend's life was in danger, yet he knew that Tom would take it as an insult to be approached on the subject of leaving.

He knew that Tom Johnson was no coward, and if necessary, he, Ralph, would defend his friend's life with his own.

Old Frank was certainly correct when he told Tom that these men, his new enemies, would stop at nothing.

Tom had soon to go to the country to try a cause before a justice of the peace, and Ralph, knowing how sensitive he was, went to Chris Norfleet, the sheriff, and asked if he could arrange to have a good man go along, without Tom knowing that he was to be shadowed. Norfleet understood the situation, and replied:

"Yes, Ralph, I have business in that section, and will go myself."

After the trial Tom started home, and when within five or six miles of town, in the broad light of the day, Sheriff Norfleet having dropped back a distance to engage in conversation with some acquaintance, a cry of "Halt!" was heard from the side of the road, as Tom was driving through the Cross Timbers of Post Oak flat. He turned to look in the direction from which the voice was heard, and several men rushed out

to try to grab his horse, but the animal became frightened, and made a mad plunge, and within a few jumps one of the reins broke. Tom, being unable to manage him, was indeed in a predicament, several shots were fired by the would-be assassins, which tended only to add to the fright of the now ferocious animal, the buggy top was up, and there was no avenue of escape left to Tom at all, when—crash! went the buggy against a tree, the pieces flying in every direction, and the driver sent headlong among the stumpy timber. The cut-throats, seeing the condition of affairs, and hearing the feet of horses in the rear, and, being convinced that their man was now beyond all harm—to them, hurriedly left.

When Norfleet came up to where Tom was, the sight that met his gaze was certainly not a pleasant one—the buggy strewn in pieces along the road, and Tom lying on the ground unconscious, with an arm broken—mangled, in fact—and blood oozing from the right temple.

It was two weeks before Tom again opened his eyes to consciousness, and then in a room, where he had been carried to one of the best

homes in Burnet. His life had, figuratively speaking, for some time hung upon a thread, but by good nursing and the strong constitution that he possessed, he would "pull through."

Old Frank was with him, and as Tom looked down at the arm by his side, in plaster of Paris, and then at Frank, the old negro's eyes glistened as he said:

"You feel betteh, suh, don' you? But den you mus'n' talk, 'cause de doctah said you mus' be kep' quiet, you know. Yes, suh, you'se all right, now."

"Well, Frank, I suppose the doctor did not forbid you talking, did he?"

"No, suh, only for t' keep you quiet, suh."

When Tom was thrown from the buggy his skull was fractured, and it was feared by the physicians for a time that it would prove to be concussion of the brain, but now all fear being dispelled on that point, he was on the sure road to recovery.

He was highly pleased when he was informed by Frank that Katie had been almost a daily visitor to his bedside, and—yes, she came

nearly every day then, with flowers and with books. She would sit and read to him when he became able to sit up and to talk, and life to him proved not to be so unendurable after all.

He soon made his appearance on the streets, and while greeting his friends one day, Frank was heard to say:

"Huh, you can't kill dat man; 'cause didn't de cow-cappers try it, an' couldn'? No, suh, Mr. Tom's dun wu'th a whole passel dem scound'els."

Thus it was, another futile effort had been made to either take the life of Tom or make him leave the country, and while they had very nearly succeeded, he was yet in Burnet, and apparently as well as ever.

In two weeks he was to be married to Katie Adams. It was generally known now in the town of Burnet.

CHAPTER XII.

TOM was again at his place of business, having now fully recovered from the serious accident that came nearly costing him his life. While he was receiving the congratulations of his friends over the country upon his narrow escape, he was also counting the days until Katie Adams would be his wife.

Some days after Tom's return to his office, Mr. Thomas and John Sterling were closeted together frequently, and old Frank noticing it, muttered to himself: "Dat sumpin' gwine t' happen'."

Thomas and John Sterling were now determined to hatch some scheme to prevent the marriage of Tom and Katie, and they were low enough to stoop to any act, and they decided to act, and at once. So far everything they had

done had proven a failure. After a whispered conversation between these two gentlemen (?) John says:

“Good; I know the very person to do the work, and I will leave for Austin to-night to see her. You remember her; she was about the lobby a great deal last winter—a little, black-eyed woman that ‘worked’ so many members on the commission bill? We don’t want a coarse, illiterate, lewd woman, you know. Ha, ha.”

“Of course this lady friend you speak of is hardly what Cæsar said his wife should be?” asked Thomas, intending the question to be a bit of sarcastic wit.

“Oh, but she is above suspicion,” said John, and they both broke out in a boisterous laugh. The negro porter was dispatched for a couple of cock-tails, and they drank to each other’s health, and repeated with a “rousing bumper” to the success of their scheme to separate Tom and Katie.

John Sterling made his trip to Austin, and upon his return, from the way he and Thomas

would wink and chuckle to each other, he had made a successful trip.

"I fixed it all right," he told his friend, "and she will be here in a few days. She made me give her five hundred in cold cash, but if she doesn't make a blunder of the affair I won't begrudge twice that amount."

Tom was so wrapt up in his own happiness that he was oblivious of his surroundings—of even the apparent coolness of his old friend Ralph. There was a change in Ralph's manner towards him, but he did not notice it. All the world may love a lover, but a lover generally loves all the world—all but his rival. But Tom did not know how near the abyss of destruction he stood.

* * * * *

It was a beautiful spring day, a day that is seen in no other but a South Texas climate; the roses in the Thomas yard had begun to bloom and fill the air with their fragrance. The magnolias seemed greener and the buds brighter, as they laughed at the breeze that fanned them. The birds that flitted from limb to limb were

no happier than the girl who was the promised wife of Tom Johnson.

Mrs. Thomas had gone down town shopping when a servant announced a lady to see Miss Katie. Katie asked the lady (?) in, and when seated, invited her to proceed with her business.

The woman was comely; a decided brunette, petite, with black, piercing eyes, and was very well, but not flashily dressed; but anyone but a pure girl unused to the ways of the world could readily have traced the lines on her face that indicated dissipation and vice.

"My dear young lady," said the strange woman, in a trembling voice, "I hardly know how to begin. Oh, God!" she cried, "help me—give me strength for this ordeal."

After wiping a few tears from her eyes she continued, in a very affected manner:

"Miss Adams, I am a stranger to you, and you to me, but what I have to say is for you—in your interest, for your future happiness. If my story proves to you what I have said, will you promise me on your honor to breathe it to no one on earth?"

"Why—I—I—do not quite understand you. What can you say to me that I should not tell my parents—or my—friends?"

"But if what I say will save you trouble—yea, misery, want and reputation, will you promise not to give the author, nor to repeat the story?"

"Yes," she said, with a kind of far-off look in her eyes, wondering what the woman could mean.

"Miss Adams, you are receiving attentions from Mr. Thomas Johnson, are you not? Are you not engaged to him?"

"What has that to do with your story, madame?" sharply asked the girl.

"It has this: he is not worthy to touch your hand; he is a base deceiver, and oh, my God! he is a villain!"

"What do you mean?" almost shouted the girl, terrified, as she rose to her feet and stood looking down in a contemptuous manner on the woman.

"I mean," replied the woman, "that he is my husband—my lawful wedded husband, and the father of my child."

Katie sank to her seat, her hands grasping

her skirts as if she were in great mental agony. The woman continued:

"He was just a boy, of course, when we married. But, Miss Adams, I believe he will come back to me yet. He promised to do so in Austin, but he failed to keep his promise to me more than once. With all his ill treatment of me, I love him still," and she very naturally broke down and cried as if her heart would break.

"More," she continued, "he cannot go back to his home where we live, for he is a forger, and is now living under an assumed name. I endured hardships, made my own support while he was in college, that he might reach the goal of his ambition. I bore the brunt of the humiliation and disgrace of his crime because I worshipped him. Since his return from school he will not own me, for he says that would reveal his identity; but now I see he wants to play me false for you—to bring disgrace upon another woman. Oh, Miss Adams, swear to me that you will not tell him that I have been to see you, for he would kill me if he knew it, and add murder

to his already heinous crime. At Austin I was mad and jealous, and threatened to come and tell you all, but he swore he would kill me—and my baby, too—if I did, and I——”

“Go!” said Katie, pointing to the door.

“But promise——”

“Go! I assure you that he shall never hear a word from my lips.”

As the woman strode from the premises Katie stood gazing at her as if her eyes were riveted. She uttered but one short sentence: “Oh, my God! such treachery!” But that was sufficient to tell a long story of almost a broken heart. Her idol was shattered—her faith was gone.

* * * * *

Tom, unaware of the fate that awaited him, a few minutes after the visit above referred to, sent Frank with a note telling Katie that he would call in the evening at their friend's, but Frank came back with this message:

“Mis' Katie say she kain' 'ceive no comp'ny dis ebe'n, suh, an' dat you'll hab t' 'scuse her, suh.”

“Is she ill, Frank?”

“No, suh, she's pleasant 'nough, suh, but dat

young lady's sick; dat's what's d' matter wid her, suh, she's sick, Mr. Tom."

Tom was impatiently waiting to hear from Katie; he had heard that she was indisposed, but not having seen her, was almost on nettles, when a negro boy a few evenings later came to the office just as he and Ralph were leaving and handed Tom a package. He saw from the handwriting where it was from, and hurried to his room eager to devour its contents. When he tore the cover from the package, there rolled out on the floor all of his letters to Katie Adams, a ring and three of the four photos he had given her. He was astounded. He looked at the bundle in amazement, and a short note caught his eye, which he grabbed and hurriedly read:

"SIR:—You will find all your letters, ring, etc. Please return, if you have any, those you have received from me.

"There is no explanation necessary. I have been informed of your past, and we will never meet again. Do not try to see me, for it would but make me hate you for it.

"KATIE ADAMS."

Had he been a criminal receiving a death sentence, he could not have suffered more. He sat as if in a stupor, the cold perspiration on his brow, but had they been drops of blood oozing from the heart, they could not have represented more pain. He looked up as if he were trying to gaze into the realms of an unknown world. Give her up? Oh, God! how could he? He arose and walked out. The night air was cooling to his feverish brain. He would go directly to her and demand an explanation. No; that would be kneeling to her vanity. He would make her come to him on bended knees, and beg his pardon. He would walk out on the prairie; and ere he knew it he found himself at the Thomas' gate, but—he passed on. He was too proud to humiliate himself that way. He would never call at that house, nor even speak to her until he had been invited. He would, however, walk back on the opposite side of the street to see if the house was lighted up. No? What could she mean? He left this part but did not go to his room; he had no objective point, only to find solitude—some place where he could get away

from the world and think. He strolled, heeding not the distance nor the direction, and far out from town he tried to think. The prairie owl, the cat bird that infested the few scattered live-oaks were his only company, but it seemed that they were laughing at his misery, instead of sympathizing with him. But he wanted to think. About what or whom? Was he alone? He thought so; thought that he was even without friends; that the whole world was against him, for now he had the proof. Then the tender part of the man took possession of him, and he became as a little child and wept—alternately cursed and wept. Cursed his fate. Yes, he hated her—no, not that, but then she deserved it, he said. Even the bright stars of the heavens seemed to look down upon him with pity. Pity? What is pity? He looked up at the stars and cried as a drowning man would cry for help: “My God, my past! What is it?”

CHAPTER XIII.

Two weeks had passed since we dropped the curtain on our last scene. The old town of Burnet seemed more quiet than usual, and the office of Tom and Ralph was devoid of that brightness that had heretofore held full sway. Even old Frank seemed sad. Thomas had kept John Sterling fully advised as to matters at home, and they were chuckling over their success. The supposed wife had returned to her habitue, wherever that was.

Katie had refused to see Tom notwithstanding his entreaties. He had repeatedly insisted on an explanation. (by note), claiming that he wanted his "past" investigated, but she, poor girl, thought this to be another piece of his acting (she would not call it villainy, though she tried), and his entreaties only stung her with a

fresh pang. For some days after the visit of the strange woman she was almost distracted, and refused to see anyone. She never uttered a word, even to her mother, of the estrangement that had been brought about between her and Tom. In answer to all questions about him, she would simply say that she would see him no more.

When Katie informed her mother some days later of her intention of going to Kentucky to visit an aunt, that good lady knew that some change had come into her daughter's life, although her husband had not dared take Mrs. Thomas into his confidence, hence, she knew not the cause of the trouble. Believing that the change would be beneficial to her daughter's health, she readily gave her consent for the trip, but Katie made her promise to tell no one where she had gone, so her mother was more at a loss to understand her than ever.

After Katie's departure Burnet had but little attraction for Tom. He was not the same man, and being of that despondent nature, again made the mistake of yielding to the tempter, and at

times tried to drown his sorrow in drink. Alas! how many weak men have tried to do the same thing only to find their mind, their soul, nearly drowned, but when coming to the surface, they would meet their sorrow or grief in all of its hideous deformity, bearing down on them heavier and with a more deadly grip than ever. If Tom Johnson was the only man that ever did this you might condemn me for telling you; if he was the only worthy man that ever dulled his bright intellect, or abused that talent that Almighty God had bestowed upon him, then it might be wrong to say that there is redemption for a man that has abused himself by drink.

Strange to say, but Tom did not confide with Ralph—with no one, as to that matter. He had considered himself continually between two fires. His life, his soul, his very self, was wrapt up in his love for this girl, and yet pride kept him from pushing himself in person in her presence. Had he told Ralph, he, no doubt, would have then and there brought about a reconciliation, and brought matters to their true light; but it was not Tom's nature to go to anyone with his troubles.

Had he broken his promise to her never to drink again? Yes—what was a promise made to so fickle a being? How he despised her one minute—and himself the next—for entertaining such a thought.

He would go at night and take a stand where he could see her house—yes, her very window—that he might get a glimpse of her. Crazy? Possibly so.

Tom Johnson was not one of your ordinary love-sick swains, but—this girl had made a new man out of him. The sweetest, best part of his life had been spent with her. She had given him inspiration, encouragement, hope—yea, life itself. Their love was not a mere passion, but it was the blending together of two human beings of opposite sex. The uniting of two natures just as opposite as sexes. Yet there was an affinity that would perpetuate that love. It seemed so to Tom, and it was so.

Affinity! How often do you find it absent in married couples? Do you realize that if you knew all the Maud Mullers and judges to-day, even in your own circle of acquaintances, that your

eyes would open in amazement? Could you but look into the inner man of many as he pores over his professional books, or his ledger, or as he treads the furrows behind the plow, you could hear the lamentations of—yea, the heart-beats throbbing out: “It might have been.”

Many a good, pure and virtuous wife, apparently happy and contented, while crooning a lullaby to the infant in her arms drops tears of regret on its sunny and innocent face—tears produced by the memory of a man other than the infant’s father.

Oh, but he of the optimistic view says that this will wear off. When, oh when? We will not all be here when the millennium comes. But——

Ralph thought he knew the cause of Tom’s trouble—per’aps a little lover’s quarrel—but thought that it would wear off in a few days—when Tom quit drinking, but, well he finally gave it up.

Tom Johnson awoke as if he had been in a horrible nightmare, and to realize that he had been leaping down, down the ladder of fame

much faster than he had climbed. His application was gone, his energy seemed dead; he wanted to shake ~ his surroundings, and especially his associates that he had made during "his nightmare," so one day Ralph was somewhat surprised to hear him say that he was going to leave Burnet. He told Ralph that he wanted to make some kind of disposition of the firm's business, and the law firm of Johnson & Sterling was dissolved.

But few of Tom's friends were even aware of the fact that he contemplated leaving, when he had already gone, his destination known to no one, not even to himself.

After drifting aimlessly about for several months, his better nature took hold of him, and he became determined to do something anyway, hence, he found himself in a Southern Louisiana town, where he made up his mind to "hang out his shingle." He had stopped in a good town, in a good country, and notwithstanding his ability, his prospects for immediate success were indeed not very bright.

A stranger without money, friends or clients,

who was only present in body—his heart, his soul, he had left in Burnet. Tom Johnson seemed to be in almost a pitiable condition. With a very scant library, and a very few dollars, he soon realized that he knew the value of true friends. One by one his books soon began to find their way to the pawn shop, to keep body and soul together. His clothing began to look threadbare; he had, in fact, almost begun to feel the pangs of hunger. But talent like his could not be kept in the dark for long. The great God does not bestow these blessings to be hid, although they are oftentimes abused, to the dishonor of the one who possesses them, and a rebuke to the God who gave them.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOM was now a stranger in a strange town. While he was well versed in the law, the Louisiana practice was new to him, and it required some time and study before he had sufficiently qualified himself for that practice. That was all the progress he had made.

One morning he began to meditate ; he realized that none of his friends knew of his whereabouts. He also took an inventory of his earthly possessions—his office fixtures. One cheap table for a desk, three stool chairs, one statute, one old greasy volume of Greenleaf on Evidence and two volumes of Chitty's Blackstone. The last three were presents from old Judge Cype, given him when he first began the study of law. They had at one time kept company with a well filled library that had long since gone.

He had never been in court since his arrival in Leeston, and as he looked at his almost thread-bare suit, he knew not whether to go or not. But court was in session, and by way of diversion he would go down and for the first time see how they run the courts in Louisiana. As he walked into the court room he beheld a spectacle that he never forgot. An old darky about fifty years old was standing up before the bar to receive his sentence to the penitentiary, having pleaded guilty to the charge of burglary. The proof showed that he had a few days previous entered the smoke-house of a planter in the night time, and taken therefrom a side of meat.

The judge appeared to be a very stern man, with a judicial appearance. He was hardly fifty years of age, but had no doubt been on the bench for some years. Tom walked in just as he was saying:

"Prisoner at the bar, having entered your plea of guilty to the charges of burglary, have you anything further to say why the sentence of the law and the court should not be passed upon you?"

The old negro first bowed his head, then sham-

bled a step or two, and just as it appeared that the judge was about to proceed, said:

“Marse Gawge—’scuse me fer not callin’ you Marse Jedge—I guess I’se guilty er stealin’ dis heah meat. I use t’ ’long to yo’ daddy long fo’ de wah. I nu’sed you, Marse Gawge, w’en you was er little boy. I use t’ play wid you, in de big house and in de cabin.

“W’en you went t’ fight de Yanks, Marse Gawge, I went long wid you. W’en you was er capin’ I was yo’ body servant. You dun sent me out many times on the same kin’ o’ trips w’at fotch me heah, Marse Gawge. W’en you was haungry, lots er times I went out and fotch in er shoat er a side er meat fo’ you. But den, Marse Gawge, dat wa’n’t stealin’ dat was fo’-agin’—dat’s w’at dey call it, den. Well, Marse Gawge, dat’s w’at I was doin’—I was jes’ fo’agin’. I couldn’ git no wo’k t’ do; I tried, but couldn’, and mah wife dun bin sick long time, and mah pickaninnies was haungry, Marse Gawge,—dat’s w’at’s made I dun it.

“I guess I kin go on to de tenipentiary, Marse Gawge, but I does hates to—I hates to lef dem

chillin' heah to starve, Marse Gawge, I'd fo'age 'fore I let 'em do dat. Yes, suh, w'en I got dis meat I was jes' fo'agin' like I did endu'ence de wah. I'd be mighty powerful willin' t' wo'k fer de meat, but——"

"The motion for a new trial in this cause is sustained, the case continued until the next term, and the defendant allowed to go on his own recognizance," said the judge, endeavoring to resume his stern, judicial look; but tears were forcing themselves down his honest cheeks, and many eyes looked on in amazement as he left the stand, and came down in the bar, where he laid his arms tenderly about the old darky, and talked to him in a tone that few could hear, owing partially to the confusion in the court room.

"Forgiveness," muttered Tom, as his eyes followed the old darky's retreating form from the house. "He is not the only one that needs it." But do they all go to the proper judge and ask it? He said that he, too, was foraging—upon the God-given body and soul; upon the intellect that should be used for his God and for his country

He returned to his little dingy office, and waited day after day for clients that came not.

While on the very brink of desperation, ready almost to quit his office, and go, he cared not where, a client came. One who introduced himself as G. D. Samuels, and known to Tom by reputation as a wealthy mill owner, and who had "struck it rich" by speculation in the timber business, and was now classed as a millionaire. He placed a very important piece of litigation in the young lawyer's hands. Tom rubbed his eyes to see that he was awake. The business had to be settled in the courts of equity, and it is useless to say that Tom succeeded in winning his claim. You can imagine his surprise to find his client calling on him one morning, and especially when he handed Tom a check for five thousand dollars, informing him that the fee was half what the litigation saved him. Tom of course was very grateful, and at first refused so large a fee, but his client insisted on his taking the full fee. Tom finally asked . . . how it was that he, a prominent business man, came to him,

a young, inexperienced lawyer, with such an important case. Samuels replied :

“Once I was friendless—an outcast, as it were ; or, to be plain I was tramping through Texas, and by some strange circumstances, was charged with murder—with a murder that I was as innocent of committing as you were, but then I had no money, was a common tramp, was arrested and tried. Being just a tramp the kind-hearted judge appointed two young lawyers to defend me. They had never had a case in court before, but, as if an act of Providence had intervened, instead of the defense being the ordinary and customary farce, for the amusement of the bench and bar, one of these young men was endowed with sense—both of them as to that—but one of them showed that he was a lawyer, and by his efforts I was acquitted. You are the man that cleared me—the man to whom I feel I owe my liberty, and I have, thank God, found an opportunity to do you a favor, though I can never repay you.”

“Are you the—the——”

“Yes, I am the tramp that you defended in Burnet for murder, but I am to-day worth some

money, and, my young friend, since I have learned who you were I have been watching you, and if I can in any way assist you I am going to do it. You need tell me nothing; I know that you have met with some kind of misfortune, or reverses at least, but it does not concern me. I have the utmost confidence in your honesty and in your ability, and have recommended you to some people that I trust will prove to be very worthy clients. Good day, sir; I will call again in a few days."

Tom had no time to express his gratitude, ere his new friend, yea, his redeemer, had gone.

From that day on Tom Johnson had clients. He had been tried and found true. Large fees and good investments soon found him not only above want, but financially speaking, in good circumstances, and with one of the best clientages in the section. Yet try as he would to be contented and forget the past, he could not. When he began to brood over his Burnet life he at once went to work, and endeavored to free himself by hard study. He tried to be jovial—was a very good mixer with the people, none of whom ever

thought that he had a disappointment in a "love affair." He had long since ceased to try to drown his sorrow in dissipation—he had, like many of his disposition, sought relief in the flowing bowl, only to find a deeper sorrow.

The pleasures of life were not denied him, so far as the world goes, hence the little indulgences that he adopted to pass the time away and make life more easy to bear, failed to bring that pleasure we are prone to crave. But had he ever experienced any real pleasures in his life? Pleasures—what are they? Like the flitting of the breeze, they appear before you for a second and then die away before you can taste the flavor. As Bobby Burns says:

*"Pleasures are like poppies spread,
You grasp the flower; its bloom is shed,
Or like the snowflake on the river,
A moment white, then melts forever."*

CHAPTER XV.

Two years had passed since Tom Johnson had turned his back to old Burnet, and to some, they were long and dreary years—years of waiting and years of toil. The reader has some idea of Tom's career in his new home, but how fared those he left behind? He had left no trace of himself in Burnet—even his former partner, and dear old friend, Ralph, he had never written.

But as to Katie Adams; think you our heroine died with a broken heart? Oh, no, she was only human; nor did she even suicide—only the very romantic people do that, and she was no more romantic than the ordinary American girl, and, while her disappointment, and what she thought to be Tom Johnson's perfidy rested heavily on her mind, she still retained possession of all her faculties. Yes, she loved him—loved him with the

true love of a true woman—what a jewel that is. If such a thing were possible, she worshipped him. For more than a year she had kept close to home, seldom going out in society, or indulging in her recreation or favorite pastime, riding and driving. She avoided John Sterling as much as possible. It had never occurred to her to doubt the story of the strange woman, and Tom's departure so soon afterwards, seemed to thoroughly corroborate it, had there been a question about it. All this her parents had, of course, urged in their argument to get her to marry John Sterling. In addition, and to make the proof more conclusive—had there been a doubt or room for a doubt—Thomas and John Sterling had never failed to ding it into her ears that Tom Johnson was now living with his wife. They always, however, failed to tell her where he was, if they had pretended to know.

* * * * *

A traveller passed through Burnet, who had met Tom in his new home, and had told some one; this she had heard and had kept the post office in her mind, yet she never dared address a

letter there. Why should she—he was married, and could possibly be nothing to her.

John Sterling continued to press his suit, but she did not want to marry him, and had repeatedly told him so; that she never could love him, for her heart was dead. But, as I have previously stated, she was only human, and with the assistance of her mother and step-father, John finally won, and to the edification of town gossips, their engagement was soon whispered around, and preparations were being made for a big wedding. Nobody seemed surprised, or, at least, claimed not to be, and you could hear from many lips the “I told-you-so,” and that “Oh, I knew that she would soon forget Tom Johnson.”

Even old Frank, who dearly loved Tom, talked to his wife Sarah about it, but he would shake his head and dubiously say: “Dat’s a monst’us fine lady, is Mis’ Katie, but I dun tole you, Sarah, she o’ter took Mr. Tom, ’deed she o’t.”

* * * * *

The lion in his cage is not the only animal that does not like confinement, and longs for freedom and recreation, and man sometimes be-

comes as restless in his daily humdrum vocation in life as the great king of beasts. Sometimes they long for a change without cause—for a rest—and if resting, then for work.

Tom Johnson was restless and had been so, for that matter, for two years or more. He had been working hard, and now wanted to get out in the world. A notion struck him that he would like to see his old home that he had left seven years ago, and if everything suited he might—well, he never failed to nurse his early ambition. Almost simultaneous with the notion he began to make preparations for the journey, and without ceremony or notice he boarded the train, telling none where he was going to or when he expected to return. He had no near or dear friends that he cared to write to meet him; expecting no demonstration upon his arrival. He had business at Galveston, and he would go that route, and when he left there he noticed that he would go through Austin, and the very thought of passing so near the old town of Burnet made his heart leap. He knew not exactly why, but he made up his mind to run up to Burnet and

stop from one train to the other, just to take a look at the old place, as it were. He ascertained that he would get there at six o'clock and leave at ten.

He was not travelling incog, but he flattered himself that no one would know him; and he would spend but little time there, just long enough to see how the old haunts looked, and—perhaps get a glimpse of her.

When he alighted from the train it was nearly dusk and there was no one that he recognized. He did not want to go to a hotel until after dark, and he sauntered across the street to a lunch counter, an enterprise that had located in the town since his departure. As he came out he began walking down towards the square, being careful to keep the back streets. He had gone but a few blocks when he heard the peals of an old church bell, her church, too—how familiar it sounded to him. He made up his mind to go to this church and take a seat in the rear, where he could see her if she came to church, not intending that she should see him. He thought it very early for a congregation to be gathering. He

saw many faces that were familiar, yet he was cautious not to make himself known. All the back seats were occupied—strange they do this at church, but the reverse at a vaudeville—when he arrived, so Tom went up and seated himself within a few seats of the altar. He was soon convinced that it was to be a wedding, noticing the beautiful flowers, drapery, etc. He wondered who it could be—if it was someone that he knew. The organist began a wedding march, and in a moment two young couples marched slowly down the aisle, and stationed themselves right and left in front of the altar; next came the minister. Then Tom knew from the whisperings near him, and from the slow, steady march at his back, that the bride and groom were coming. His morbid curiosity was devouring him—who on earth could it be? “Look how pale she is,” said one woman to her neighbor. “What a handsome couple,” said another, and “I wonder if she really loves him?” etc., until they had passed by and—“My God!” escaped Tom’s lips. It was Katie Adams and John Sterling. As they made the circle to face the altar, Katie’s eyes met

Tom's as he sat within a few feet staring at her, in a wild, blank gaze, his face looking as if it was cut out of white marble. She gave one loud, piercing scream, and fell to the floor.

Tom saw the commotion; heard a dozen questions by the gossipers, saw the crowd gather in excitement about the bride and groom, and then—he was outside walking towards the depot.

He did not go to the hotel; saw but few who knew him; asked no questions and answered none, and when he boarded the ten o'clock train he looked like a man who had grown ten years older in two hours.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM reached the place of his birth looking haggard and worn. He did not look like the smooth faced boy that had left there seven years ago to matriculate in the great Southern law school. No one knew him—not even his old school mates that he would meet on the streets would recognize him. His old friend Judge Cype had been dead for more than a year, and he saw nothing to draw him near the spot where he first saw the light, and he had been there a day or two when it seemed an age. He strolled down to the river where he had swam, fished and played in his childhood, and the waving branches, as they would sway backwards and forwards, blown by the breezes that followed the stream, seemed to cry out in pity to him; the sycamore and the gum appeared to almost reach

the sky, and get closer and closer to him until he almost became suffocated. He had an impulse to run away, to get out as fast as he could, and in his almost delirious condition, without thinking he actually started to run up the bank, and the tops of the trees seemed to be bending down as if they were trying to catch him. Nowhere did he go but a desire to move on would take possession of him. In his sleep he would cry out as if someone had plunged a knife into him, and then he would get up and walk the floor in his agony. His stay here was more like a horrid dream than a pleasure.

He visited his old home place some miles from town. He would buy it—that is, the old house built by his grandfather, when Arkansas was a territory; the place where his childhood days were spent with his father and his old black mammy. Perhaps he would see “mammy”; no, he remembered now that she had been dead for some years, but he would go.

When he reached the place he found—yes, there it was. There were the two old locust trees, on the river bank, out in front of the house,

but the bank had encroached by its cavings, until these grand old trees that had sheltered sire and grandsire, would soon tumble in. Then he looked towards the house, and there it stood as it had for more than half a century. An old fashioned two story building, with chimneys at the end—that is, at one end, the others having tumbled to the ground. Out in the yard were still the old Bois D'arc, and mulberry trees, whose shade he had often played under when a boy, and yes, there was the old sycamore that stood back of his father's office. The old office was now used to store plows in. He could not see the grand old orchard that stood near the house; it was gone, and in its stead a cotton patch. The two old pear trees that grew at the south end of the house, and whose branches reached up to the windows of the room he used to sleep in, and where the mocking bird used to come and wake him in the morning, were gone; part of the old house was gone—it had all gone to rack. It made him sad—sick—to look at it, but he would go inside. A woman, the wife of a tenant, and several little tow-headed children met him at the

door. When he went into his mother's room, where he was born, the room always kept and designated by old "mammy" as "Mis' Mary's room," he took off his hat, for it appeared that he was on holy ground. But he only saw the furnishings of a hovel; filth everywhere; decay all over the house; he was sick, and indeed glad to get away.

Oh, how lonely he was. The thought never struck him to call upon his relatives. But let them go; he did not care to see them, nor to see anyone; he did not want to stay there; he wanted to go, but where?

As soon as possible he left for his Louisiana home—no, he would not call it home! He had no home, no place where he could lay down to rest. He had gone to the spot where his father and mother were buried, and standing there, viewing the two tomb stones side by side, thought the only persons in the world that had ever cared for him, had been taken by the hand of God, and it seemed as a punishment to him.

What had he done to be cursed? Oh, God, how

he prayed for a mother, for a father, sister or brother, for anyone he might confide in—pour out his grief and troubles to—even the affections of anyone would have been consoling indeed. To have had someone to confide in would have soothed his wounded feelings. The woman he loved had scorned him because he was poor, and had been raised a pauper—was that it; what else could it be? Then he thought: was the woman with such ideas worthy the love of a true man? But he would dwell upon this thought but a minute, for he knew that he loved her. He thought that the whole world had turned against him, and considered himself an outcast and an imposition upon society. Society, bah! What is society from the world's standpoint?

What would he do? He did not know and he did not care. By a matter of chance, as well as choice, did he return to his new home, and resume his work with renewed energy. He would work; he would succeed; he would make for himself a name, and attain a position in life that no one need be ashamed of. God had blessed him with an intellect and a talent that was recog-

nized by his fellow-man, who trusted him with implicit confidence in his new home; hence, he would from now on look after his own welfare. Himself—who else was there for him to work for? What per cent. of the successful business men of to-day do not work solely for *self*? Number one first, last, and all the time, is the life motto of ninety-five per cent. of the successful men of the age.

Tom tried to forget that he ever lived in Burnet, that he ever knew of such a place; but while trying to forget, the more vivid everything appeared to him. His whole Burnet life would constantly appear in panoramic view before his eyes. Could he but forget the past! Ah, what fortunes would be spent if money could but blot out the past! How many of us that have nothing to regret—nothing that we would like to forget?

Tom devoted himself to business, solely, and recreation and amusement very little. He shunned society, yet he was the invited guest of many of the social functions of the town. Many of the elder dames with marriageable daughters

cast their eyes on the young lawyer, as they considered him a fairly "good catch," but do what he would, there was but one woman for him. His affections and his sole attention were given to his mistress, which the writers call a jealous one—the law.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE reader, perhaps, wonders what became of Katie Adams; if the marriage ceremony was resumed, and she was made Mrs. John Sterling?

No, after she had regained consciousness her condition was so alarming that she was at once removed to her home, where she kept her room for some time.

This incident was not only astounding to those present at the time, but was the talk of the country for some time to come.

It was newspaper talk and general gossip that Katie had thought Tom dead, and that it was his ghost that appeared when the ceremony was about to be performed that would make her another man's wife.

Thomas and John Sterling were again thwarted, and John, who had, of course, found out what he thought to be the cause of it all, bit-

terly cursed his fate, likewise the person of one Tom Johnson.

After her recovery Katie refused to marry right away; she thought John Sterling to be more repulsive than ever, and could hardly bear to be in his company, notwithstanding the strong and earnest entreaties of her mother and father.

"I cannot marry him, mother—I do not love him—I hate him!" she cried.

"Oh, my child, why do you talk so? You will learn to love him."

"No, mother, I have already learned to love once, and want no more lessons. I love Tom Johnson!" she thoughtlessly said.

"My God!" cried Mrs. Thomas, "that wretch, and he married to another."

"I do not believe it—I mean, mother, that some times there is something that tells me he is not married."

Katie Adams knew not what prompted her to say this, for never for a moment had she doubted his being married. She spoke in a moment of desperation or excitement. The conversation ended and she went to her room to think.

"What shall I do," she said, and going to a book-case she picked up a small volume of poems, on the fly-leaf of which was written the name: Leeston, La. She looked it over for some minutes as if in deep thought, and finally seating herself at a desk, wrote the following letter:

"To the Postmaster, Leeston, La.

"MY DEAR SIR:—

"Can you give me any information of one Thomas B. Johnson, an attorney in your town? Whether he is married, and if so, when and to whom, and if he is living with his wife? This is confidential, and I enclose a fee, so if you are unable to give the desired information please turn this letter over to some reliable attorney.

"Respectfully,

"FRANK HARRIS.

"Burnet, Tex., 4, 7, 18—."

She backed the letter, and after having done so could not have told why she had written it. That afternoon she drove over to the post office, where she mailed the letter, and then on her way back called old Frank out to his gate, and said:

"Frank, I want to ask you to do me a favor—will you do it?"

"Do hit! W'y, Mis' Katie, ef I was t' dise'bey you, de starhs 'ud fall down on dis ol' niggah an' bu'n im up. I'deed dey 'ud. Do you a favor—w'y jes' name it. Mus' I go bus' mah ol' head op'n gin dat tree—wellum, heah goes. Ef you say go jump in de ribber, I'm gwine right now, an——"

"Oh, no, Frank, listen: A letter may come to you in a few days, and I want you to bring it straight to me without opening it—do you hear? And do not say one word to anyone about it."

"You'se c'manded, an' w'en you do, dat settles it wid dis niggah. I will, Mis' Katie; I'll jes' fly to you."

"Well, remember now, not a word," said the girl as she slipped a five dollar gold piece into the darky's hand, and then she drove off leaving him scraping and bowing, in imitation of a Chesterfield.

John Sterling had almost despaired of winning Katie, but Thomas continued to encourage him. John knew that she disliked him, that she loved Tom Johnson, but he would chuckle with some degree of satisfaction when he would think

of their separation, and of what brought it about. In his mind the gulf was too wide to ever be bridged between him and Katie.

About a week after Katie had mailed her letter to the Louisiana postmaster, Frank brought a letter addressed to himself. She was so eager to know its contents that she snatched the letter from his hands and ran upstairs, where she read:

"Mr. Frank Harris, Burnet, Texas.

"DEAR SIR:—

"Your favor making inquiry of Thomas B. Johnson, Esq., of this place, was handed me by our postmaster. Replying will say that Mr. Johnson has lived here for three years—having officed in the same building as myself during the entire time, as well as to board at the same hotel that I do. Mr. Johnson is unmarried—was never married. He is one of the leading attorneys for this section of the state, and is perfectly reliable in every way.

Yours truly,

"SAM R. REED.

"Leeston, La., May 14th, 18—."

The letter dropped from her hands to the floor, and there she sat for some time in a blank stare,

as if trying to look at some invisible object. What passed through her brain I am not prepared to say, but it appeared that she was trying to unravel some mooted question that had completely taken possession of her mind. She picked up the letter, read and re-read it, and finally placing it in a little book walked downstairs.

"The letter says that he is a single man, but perhaps he has kept his wife in the dark as he did here?" Thus soliloquized the girl. "Oh, if I could only make up my mind—I do not believe—I do not know what to believe."

The more she thought of the matter the more it worried her, until finally, a few days after receiving the letter, she sent a note to Ralph Sterling asking him to call at the house.

"What on earth can she want with me," thought Ralph, but when the time came he was there.

He could not help but note the change in Katie. She did not look like the little girl he had played with. She appeared to be sad and melancholy, yet he thought her to be the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Ralph," she said, when they had been seated for some time, "I sent for you to have a talk, and I want you to be frank with me, and tell me the whole truth, and promise to say nothing of this conversation."

He readily assented, of course, but wondering all the time what was the object of the interview.

"I want to talk to you about Tom Johnson——"

"Tom Johnson!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she answered, "I want you to tell me all you know of him."

"I know but little of him now; he has never written me a line since he left here, and I have but recently learned where he is."

"I mean of what you knew of him up to the time that he came here."

"Well, Tom and I met at the University of Virginia, and were class-mates, and yes, room-mates, too, for two years. We were the very best of friends and were never separated for twenty-four hours during our college life."

"But what of him before he came to college?" she asked.

"I can tell you nothing except that he was a

poor boy without money or influence. He had worked his way through his state university. There were two boys in college that were in the University of Arkansas with him, and they always spoke of him in the highest terms. They loved Tom, as did all of us, and were continually telling of his deeds 'back home,' as they would call it."

"Ralph, was he—was Tom Johnson ever married?"

"Married! Who? Tom Johnson married? Why, Katie, if a woman was to look at him he would almost break his neck in trying to get away. At college we always laughed at him for being so bashful. If he was ever married it was when he wore kilt-skirts or knee-pants. You are the only girl that he ever talked to almost, let alone paying attentions to." And Ralph laughed heartily.

"But, Ralph, I have been told that he was married before he came here, and that he was a— forger, and was, when here, living under an assumed name."

"It's a lie!" shouted Ralph. "An infamous

lie; and a slander upon the name of one of God's noblemen. No more honorable or higher minded man ever lived than Tom Johnson. Katie, tell me who has blasphemed his name and brought these infamous charges against him? I swear he is as innocent of such a charge as you are—as innocent as the youngest babe in the town.”

“But, Ralph, there was a woman here that claimed that he was her husband, and the father of her child.”

“She lied—she was an impostor and should be punished for slandering a good man. I will write Tom and have this matter cleared up.”

“But I have seen this woman, and she told me her story in this very room.”

Ralph's brows began to knit and for some time he sat as if trying to solve a problem.

“Katie,” he said, “there is something wrong. When did all this happen?”

“A few weeks before he left Burnet,” she replied.

Ralph was silent for some moments, and then asked:

“And was this why you and he separated?”

"Yes."

"What did he say about it?"

"Ralph, I never—that is, the woman—made me promise to say nothing to him about it, and I——"

"You never told him—never gave him a chance to explain? Katie, does he know why you refused to see him? What did you tell him?"

"I wrote him that I had been informed of his past and knew all, and that I would never see him again," said the girl, trembling as if she had an ague.

"Katie, you did a great wrong. There is some damnable plot behind all this, and you have been the dupe, while poor Tom has been the victim."

Here she gave way to the instincts of the woman and began to cry.

"I fear so, Ralph. Oh, Ralph, why did I then not ask you about this? I have never mentioned it to anyone—but, Ralph, John told me that Tom had gone back to his wife; that he had a friend who had seen them."

"John—John Sterling—you say he told you this?" Ralph had arisen from his seat and stood looking at the girl. "My God, can this be true—can it be possible?" This he said in almost an inaudible tone, drooping his head.

"Yes," she said, "and I did not doubt it until recently, and then it began to dawn upon me that something might be wrong, and I wrote this letter to the postmaster where Tom lives, and received this reply." Here she handed Ralph the letter she had gotten from Lawyer Reed, of Lees-ton, Louisiana.

Ralph read the letter, handed it back to her, and arose to take his leave.

"Katie, say nothing of this affair, for I am going to try to fathom it out."

She promised to do as requested, and Ralph continued:

"One question, Katie: Do you love Tom Johnson yet?"

"Yes," she said, "I do love him, and now that I believe that I have wronged him, I will always love him."

"I thought as much," said Ralph, and bidding

her good-day, he passed out, and when on the street muttered to himself: "Could it be possible that John, my brother, would enter into so black a scheme, so foul and damnable a plot? God forbid!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

RALPH wrote Tom a long, friendly letter, and when the latter received it he wept like a child.

"How could I ever have allowed my own selfishness to cause me to forget the best friend that I ever had—more than a brother has Ralph Sterling been to me," said Tom.

Ralph's letter seemed to put new life into Tom, although nothing had been said of Katie—not a word.

Tom answered the letter and very dexterously avoided mentioning her name, although he was dying to know something of her. He had made up his mind that she long since became Mrs. Sterling, though he would not have asked Ralph anything about it for the world.

* * * * *

A strange woman had made her appearance in Burnet on several occasions, and had always

been in conversation with John Sterling, but not for the past two months.

"I told her that I would not give her another cent," said John, talking to his friend, Mr. Thomas, "and she went away threatening to tell Katie the whole affair, but I knew that she would not do it."

"The next time she comes, throw her out of the house," said Thomas. "But, no, we had best get rid of her in another way. Threaten to have her arrested for vagrancy or something. The way to do these creatures when they get as low as she has fallen is to threaten them with the law; that is the only thing on earth that they fear; they have had a taste of that and know what it means."

But she did come to Burnet again, and this time she did not go to the bank.

One morning, about three years after Tom's departure from Burnet, a poorly clad, haggard looking woman made her appearance at the Thomas mansion and called for Miss Katie, who, of course, invited her in.

"What! You here!" cried Katie, looking at

the trembling wretch as if she could devour her—with her eyes.

“Yes, Miss Adams,” she said, “I am here, and I came to undo the wrong that I did three years ago. I have prayed to God to forgive me for it, and now I come to ask you to do the same thing—forgive me for being the impostor and criminal that I was.”

“Then—then you are not Tom Johnson’s wife?” cried the excited girl.

“No,” she said, “I have never spoken to the man in my life.”

“How could you have acted and made the story you told me, then?” asked Katie.

“I was hired to do so, and was then vile enough and low enough to stoop to any crime for money,” replied the wretched woman.

“Hired? I do not understand—who could have hired you?”

“John Sterling,” replied the woman. “He came to me in Austin and told me that you were to marry this Mr. Johnson; that he wanted you himself, but that you loved Tom Johnson, and that he wanted to turn you against him; that if I

would go to you and tell you the story that he taught me he would give me five hundred dollars down and five hundred more when he and you were married. I have sunk very low, Miss Adams—so low that I cannot now earn a living; my charms are gone, and men that used to bow at my feet and come at my beck and call, lavish upon me jewels and money, will now pass me by unnoticed. They would not stoop to lift me from the gutter; but I still have a soul, and what few days I have to live, even though burdened with disease, I do not want spent in committing crime nor harboring in my heart those that I have already committed.”

“I hope not,” said Katie, “but if you are honest I want your story to be witnessed.”

Katie sent for Ralph, who, being a notary, was requested to take down the woman’s statement in the form of an affidavit.

When this woman told her story in detail, and mentioned the name of John Sterling as the man who had hired her to do the work, Ralph dropped his pen and cried: “Great God, is this the truth?”

Katie did not seem to be the least bit excited, but, on the contrary, was perfectly calm all the way through, until the woman related the fact that Mr. Thomas was present in the bank and helped to plan the whole affair, and agreeing to make the way clear for the woman on her first visit by having Mrs. Thomas come to town shopping. When this was told the girl turned as white as marble and bit her lips until the blood almost oozed out, but said not a word.

Ralph cautioned Katie to say nothing of this interview with the woman, and left. Katie showed the woman out, and placing a roll of bills in her hand, which at first was refused, but finally accepted, she went—we know not where, but from the sight of Katie Adams, and we hope forever.

CHAPTER XIX.

RALPH was surprised to find in his morning mail, a few days after the woman episode, a letter from Tom, dated at Austin, and informing him that he would be there a few days on business, asking Ralph if he would not run down to see him; that he would not come to Burnet at all.

Ralph had said nothing to anyone—his father nor John—of what he knew of John's infamy. He thought seriously about Tom's letter. He could take the evening train and be with Tom by six o'clock, and then he would tell him all. He thought how near this piece of work came to ruining at least one life, but now that he would tell Tom all about how it happened, and then—well, John Sterling was his brother, but he thanked God from the bottom of his heart that Katie had not married him. Would he tell

Tom? No, he was really not the one to tell him, but Katie should do so; it was her duty to do it; but how could she? Tom had said that he would not come to Burnet, and who could blame him? "What will I do?" Ralph asked himself, and, as if his brain had prompted an immediate answer, he put on his hat and went at once to the Thomas house and called for Katie.

"Katie, I am going to Austin this afternoon, and I want you to go with me."

"Go with you? Why, what on earth calls you to Austin so suddenly, Ralph, and especially of such vital importance that I should accompany you?"

"Because," he said, "Tom is there."

"Tom is there—Tom in Austin?"

"Yes," he replied.

"No, I—I had better not go," she slowly replied.

"I think that you should go; he is not coming here, and you have wronged him deeply. Katie, I think it your duty to go to him and tell him all. It is true that the wooing generally comes from the other side, but if you will only think

about how Tom has been treated, and how he must have suffered, I think that you will agree with me."

"I will go," she said.

So at six o'clock that afternoon Ralph and Katie alighted from the train at Austin and were driven to the Driskell Hotel.

Ralph at once hunted Tom up, and of course the greeting between old friends was affectionate, indeed. Tom began to tell Ralph what a selfish wretch he had been for not keeping him posted as to his whereabouts, for not writing him at all. He begged Ralph's forgiveness a hundred times, and each time Ralph forgave him a hundred times.

"But," said Ralph, "we are indeed selfish, for there is another who wants to see you, and is in the parlor waiting now."

"Who?" asked Tom.

"Oh, an old Burnet friend."

"I do not want to see any Burnet friends, Ralph, but you."

"Oh, yes, you do," Ralph replied, and by this time they were nearly even with the parlor door.

"You go on in and I will run down and speak to a gentleman, for I require to be braced up with something else besides the joy of meeting an old friend."

"Who can it be?" muttered Tom, and gently opened the door.

When Tom saw Katie Adams advance to meet him his knees began to tremble and he almost dropped to the floor; his blood seemed to dart through his veins like streaks of lightning, and his heart could hear and feel it throbbing in his throat.

Without a word, she ran to him, threw her arms about his neck, crying:

"Oh, Tom, can you ever forgive me?"

Tom was puzzled. He did not for some moments say a word, but would embrace her, hold her out at arms' length and look at her as if he was not sure that he was dreaming—to see whether it was the real Katie—his Katie, that he had so long worshipped, and for whom he had suffered a thousand deaths.

"Yes, Katie, if you will tell me all—what I shall forgive you for?"

Then she related all—about the woman coming to her first and last, and how she came so nearly marrying John Sterling, and why. She finally gave Tom the sworn statement the woman had made. While reading it his face was alternately black with rage and bright with smiles. Black with rage when reading the infamy of his rival, but then he would think of his good friend Ralph and his sweetheart by his side, and revenge passed from his breast—that is, that revenge that calls for personal violence, and then he would draw Katie to his breast and kiss her a few times more than necessary, trying, it seemed, to make up for three years' lost time in one short evening.

Ralph and Ella Arnold came in, Ralph crying out:

“Here, you folks must be deaf. We’ve been a-hemming and a-hawing and clearing our throats for the past five minutes, but you have been too interested to get out of the way of a tornado. We didn’t want to break in upon your tête-à-tête, but we had to come in some time. I don’t know how you all

feel, but I am, to use a vernacular familiar on the plains, as hungry as a wolf, and am more than anxious to use what little French I know reading the bill-of-fare down in the dining-room."

That evening these four young people saw Tom Keene in "Othello" from a box in the opera house, and yet there was no tragedy in their hearts.

The next day Ralph and Katie returned to Burnet and Tom to his home at Leeston.

Tom came back to Austin a few weeks later, and while there, in the private parlors of that same hotel there was a quiet double wedding, the contracting parties being Tom Johnson and Katie Adams, Ralph Sterling and Ella Arnold.

The marriage of the last couple was a surprise even to Tom and Katie, and Ralph was called upon to explain.

"You see," said Ralph, "I tried to get her back as a stenographer, and couldn't; but in reality I didn't want her as a stenographer, but as my wife. Oh, yes, of course, I have been in love with her all the time, but I just didn't ex-

actly understand it, and while she loved me just as much as she could, she never even hinted it until I came out flat-footed, so to speak, and asked her to marry me.

"Say, Tom, Ella insists **that** I should have a young man for my office help now. What do you think about it?"

"Well, Ralph, knowing you as I do, I think that it would be better," Tom laughingly said.

"Well, I guess I will let her have her way, and no more girls in the office."

* * * * *

Five years is a very long time to some people, but they were not very long to Tom Johnson and his lovely wife, for they were years of happiness—years of joy.

Old Burnet is plodding along as ever, for some of the best people on earth are there. Colonel Sterling, his good wife, and Mrs. Thomas have passed away. John Sterling and Thomas are still planning, their only object being the almighty dollar.

Down on the coast in Louisiana live two very happy little families, one of which had just re-

turned from the nation's capitol, where its liege lord has been to represent his district in Congress—Tom Johnson.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Johnson and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Sterling were seated out under the beautiful lawn trees of the home of the Johnsons, the Sterlings living in the next block. Tom said:

"No, Ralph, I want no more politics. I want to live at home now, for I have a home as the word implies. I will not receive a re-election, but from now on I will try to relieve you of some of the work of the law firm of Johnson & Sterling."

"Come heah, you w'ite rask'l," said an African voice down in the yard.

"What is the matter, Frank?" asked Tom.

"W'y, dis heah lit'l ol' Tom Johnson all time pesterin' Mr. Ralph's lit'l gal. Yes, suh, all time th'owin' clods at 'er."

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